

## Numbers Overview

Belcroft Bible Church: (lesson 10)



Lesson Numbers	Wednesday Night Pentateuch Lesson Titles	Class Dates
1	Pentateuch Introduction: From Paradise to the Promised Land	2/11
2	Primeval Period: Genesis 1-11 and the Noahic Covenant	2/18
3	Primeval Period: Genesis 1-11 and the Noahic Covenant	2/25
4	Patriarchal Period: Genesis 12-25	3/4
5	The Abrahamic Covenant	3/11
6	Genesis 26-50 and God's Faithfulness	3/18
7	Q &A with Pastor Matt	3/25
8	Exodus Overview	4/15
9	Leviticus Overview	4/22
<b>10</b>	<b>Numbers Overview</b>	<b>4/29</b>
11	Deuteronomy Overview	5/6

This class begins a *Bible Overview Series* where the elders will be systematically teaching us through the Old Testament over the next few years during the Wednesday night winter/spring semester. The goal for this semester will be to gain a clear overview of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Thus, we will seek to understand the foundational nature of the Pentateuch while also seeing the purpose, main theme, some interpretative issues along with the historical setting of each individual book. This teaching time will also seek to help you better understand the critical nature of some of the primary Biblical covenants and how they fit into God's overall plan for His people in Christ. Have you ever wondered what all those sacrifices were about and why God gave all those laws to Israel? Have you ever been perplexed by God's covenant with Abraham or wondered how God's covenant with Noah fits into God's plan for the ages? Well, it is the goal of this class to wrestle with those questions and many more as we work through the Pentateuch together!

## Introduction to Numbers<sup>1</sup>

~ While Leviticus seems like an odd title to many for the third book of the Pentateuch the title “Numbers” for the fourth book is even more interesting. Sadly, the title has discouraged some Christians from a serious study of this part of the Torah. Yet, this book is very important to the chronology of Israel, the theology of the Pentateuch and the overall plan of Yahweh. Numbers is a shocking book on many levels as it displays the open and ongoing rebellion of God’s people despite His personal and faithful protection and provision to them. Both the rebellious response of Israel and the gracious response of Yahweh are not expected and serve as great lessons for God’s people throughout every age.

~ Hence why Paul and the writer of Hebrews pointed to the events in Numbers as illustrations and warnings for NT believers. “Those who make a good start are not crowned, but those who finish the course! Paul drew the lesson from this book that Christians must avoid presumption (1 Cor 10:1–12). The writer of Hebrews saw here a warning against unbelief (Heb 3:19).”<sup>2</sup>

~ This book dramatically demonstrates the fickle nature of the human heart and the painful reality of judgement. Yet, as Michael Grisanti says, “Regardless of the ‘bad news,’ God will still bring His promise to pass.” (*The Word and the World*, 232). By word count Numbers with 32,902 words is the largest book of the Pentateuch. This book, the fifth largest in the Old Testament, is divided into thirty-six chapters and 1,288 verses.<sup>3</sup>

~ English Title: “Numbers” was the name of the book in the Latin Vulgate, “*Numeri*” which had derived it from the Greek title “*Arithmoi*” in the LXX (Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). The title was probably chosen because of the large amount of numbers throughout the book and most specifically because of the two census takings or numberings recorded in chapters 1-4 and 26.

Hebrew Title: The Hebrew name is “in the wilderness” which comes from the fifth Hebrew word in Numbers 1:1 “*bemidhbar*” and more appropriately describes the setting and scope of the book. As Dr. Smith says, “This title is an excellent description of the contents of the book for it is concerned with the wilderness period of Israel’s history.”<sup>4</sup>

**Authorship of Numbers**: The canonicity of *Numbers* as part of the Pentateuch as gone largely unquestioned. As the MacArthur Study Bible says, “The first 5 books of the Bible, called the Law, of which Numbers is the fourth, are ascribed to Moses throughout Scripture (Josh. 8:31; 2 Kin. 14:6; Neh. 8:1; Mark 12:26; John 7:19). The book of Numbers itself refers to the writing of Moses in 33:2 and 36:13” (MSB, 195).

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my seminary notes and faithful professors whose diligent work and investment into my life serve as the foundation to all the material presented in this class. I want to publically acknowledge one of my favorite teachers Dr Keith Essex as his course notes in *Old Testament Studies* serve as my outline for this class material.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 405). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 404.

**Key Word and General Theme:** There are a couple options for a key word that summarizes the contents of Numbers of which “Wilderness” and “Disobedience” would be at the top of the list. However, the reason that the wilderness and disobedience play such major roles in this book is because of Israel’s, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, heart of “*Unbelief*.” Therefore, I think the best keyword for this book is *Unbelief*.

~ Thus, the general theme would be Israel’s wandering in the wilderness because of unbelief. As one writer put it, “...this attitude of unbelief was crystallized into disobedience.” Another way to see this general theme while summarizing the content is understanding Numbers as the “marching and murmuring of Israel.” As Smith says, “The immediate purpose of the book is to relate the history of God’s people from the time of the first census until the final encampment before they entered the Promised Land. For the most part during that period Israel was on the march from Mt. Sinai to the Plains of Moab just across Jordan from Jericho. Although they were being led by the Lord, all during that march God’s people complained about their circumstances.”<sup>5</sup>

**Date of Events:** The MSB is helpful here explaining how, “The book of Numbers concentrates on events that take place in the second and fortieth years after the Exodus. All incidents recorded in 1:1–14:45 occur in 1444 B.C., the year after the Exodus. Everything referred to after 20:1 is dated ca. 1406/1405 B.C., the 40th year after the Exodus. The laws and events found in 15:1–19:22 are undated, but probably all should be dated ca. 1443 to 1407 B.C. The lack of material devoted to this 37-year period, in comparison with the other years of the journey from Egypt to Canaan, communicates how wasted these years were because of Israel’s rebellion against the Lord and His consequent judgment.” Events begin 1445 (7:1; 9:15) to 1406 B.C. (Deut. 1:3)

### CHRONOLOGY OF NUMBERS

CENSUS AT SINAI	LEAVE SINAI	ARRIVE KADESH	AARON’S DEATH	ARRIVE ZERED	MOSES’ ADDRESS
2nd Yr	2nd Yr	3 <sup>rd</sup> or 40th Yr	40th Yr	?	40th Yr
2nd Mo	2nd Mo	1st Mo	5th Mo		11th Mo
1st Da	20th Da	1st Da	1st Da		1st Da
Nm 1:1	Nm 10:11	Nm 20:1	Nm 33:38	Dt 2:14	Dt 1:3, 5
	19 Days	11 Months	37+ Years	4+ Months	6Months
		38 Years			
		Dt 2:14 <sup>6</sup>			

<sup>5</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., pp. 404–405). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from *Ibid.*, 409.

## A Linear Chronology of Numbers [cf. MSB, 111]

<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Year</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	The Offering of Carts and Oxen at the Tabernacle (7:1-9); The Cloud and Trumpets (9:15-10:10)
1 <sup>st</sup> Month	1-12	The Offerings of Each Tribal Leader at the Tabernacle (7:10-89) The Arrangement of the Lamps and the Dedication of the Levites (8:1-26)
	14	The Second Passover (9:1-8)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Month	1 <sup>st</sup>	The Numberings Begin and Further Laws Given (1:1-6:27)
	14	The Passover for the Defiled (9:9-14)
	20	The Departure from Sinai (10:11-32)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Month		
		Journey from Sinai to Kadesh (10:33-12:16)
4 <sup>th</sup> Month		
	20	Spies Sent Out (13:1-20) Spying the Land (13:21-24)
5 <sup>th</sup> Month		
6 <sup>th</sup> Month	1 <sup>st</sup>	Spies Return and the People Rebel against the Lord (13:25-14:38) The Futile Invasion Attempt (14:39-45)
7 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> Month		
		Death in the Wilderness (15:1-19:22)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year through 39 <sup>th</sup> Year		
<b>40<sup>th</sup> Year</b>		Miriam Dies (20:1)
1 <sup>st</sup> Month		The Rebellion of Moses and Aaron at Meribah (20:2-13)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Month		Edom Denies Israel Passage (20:14-21)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Month		Journey to Mount Hor (20:22)
4 <sup>th</sup> Month		Aaron Dies (20:23-28; 33:38)
5 <sup>th</sup> Month		Aaron Mourned (20:29)
6 <sup>th</sup> Month		
		Travel to and Victories in Transjordan (21:1-22:1)
7 <sup>th</sup> Month		
8 <sup>th</sup> Month		Balaam (22:2-25:18)
9 <sup>th</sup> Month		
		Final Preparations for Canaan (26:1-36:13)
10 <sup>th</sup> Month		
11 <sup>th</sup> Month		Moses Exhorts Israel (Deut. 1:5) Moses Dies (Deut. 34:5)
12 <sup>th</sup> Month		Moses Mourned (Deut. 34:8)

## Journeys in the Wilderness

c. 1446 B.C.

The book of Numbers details the Israelites' experience in the wilderness as they journeyed from Mount Sinai to Canaan. As with the exodus, it is difficult to establish the exact route that the Israelites took, but it is generally believed that they headed east from Mount Sinai until they reached the Red Sea, where they turned northward to the top of the gulf and on to Kadesh-barnea.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 258). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

**The Geography in Numbers:** (This whole section taken from *Old Testament Survey Series: The Pentateuch* by Dr. James E. Smith listed in the footnotes throughout)

1. At Sinai. Israel's departure from Mt. Sinai is narrated in 10:10. All events recorded from Exodus 19 to Numbers 10 took place at the holy mount. As noted above, in Numbers this involves only nineteen days. A geographical analysis of Numbers indicates six stages in the movement of God's people, during which time a census was taken and the people prepared for the journey to Canaan.
2. From Sinai to Kadesh (10:11–12:16). According to Numbers 33:16–36 Israel encamped at twenty spots between Sinai and Kadesh. The three most important of these were Taberah, where the fire from God burned in the outer edges of the camp; Kibroth Hattaavah, where many died of food poisoning; and Hazeroth, where Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses. Identifying the camping spots between Sinai and Kadesh is next to impossible. The text indicates that Taberah was a three-day journey from the mount. Since Taberah is not mentioned in the itinerary of Numbers 33 it is possible that this spot and Kibroth Hattaavah were one and the same.
3. At Kadesh. Almost seven chapters (13:1–20:21) speak of events at Kadesh. The Tabernacle was located here for some thirty-eight years. Actually very little is known of this "wandering" period. Perhaps the individual tribes ranged far and wide through the Wilderness of Zin, with Kadesh being the hub which held them together as a nation.
4. From Kadesh to the Valley of Moab near Pisgah (20:22–21:20). Eight camping spots are enumerated in the itinerary of Numbers 33:36–48. Eight additional camping spots in this phase of the journey are mentioned in Numbers 21, but undoubtedly some of these are the same as those in Numbers 33. The general location of some of these spots is made possible by the notation of more familiar landmarks (e.g., Red Sea, Zered Valley, Arnon river). Nevertheless, precise location of these spots is impossible.
5. From the valley of Moab to the Plains of Moab opposite Jericho (21:21–35). Israel engaged Sihon, an Amorite king, in warfare and captured his capital of Heshbon. Jazer was also captured from the Amorites. Israel then marched north into Bashan where king Og was defeated at Edrei.
6. In the Plains of Moab opposite Jericho (22:1–36:13). The Moabite king Balak sent to Pethor near the Euphrates to secure the services of a soothsayer named Balaam. During this encampment Israel launched a holy war against the Midianites. The boundaries of the Promised Land were spelled out (34:1–12).<sup>8</sup>

**See chart below to orientate this specific places**

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., pp. 410–412). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.



## Outline and Structure of Numbers:

~ One of the ways to study and follow the flow of Numbers is by tracing the geographical trail followed by God's people. Therefore, one of the ways "the Book of Numbers can be divided into three main divisions: (1) the preparation for march at Sinai, (2) the march from Sinai to the Plains of Moab, and (3) the completion of the march."<sup>9</sup> One of the easiest ways to think through Numbers is Israel at Sinai (1-10); Israel from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea (11-20); Israel from Kadesh to plains of Moab or the Jordan (21-36).

~ As the MSB explains, "Most of the events of the book are set "in the wilderness." The word "wilderness" is used 48 times in Numbers. This term refers to land that contains little vegetation or trees, and because of a sparsity of rainfall, it cannot be cultivated. This land is best used for tending flocks of animals. In 1:1–10:10, Israel encamped in "the wilderness in Sinai." It was at Sinai that the Lord had entered into the Mosaic Covenant with them (Ex. 19–24). From 10:11–12:16, Israel traveled from Sinai to Kadesh. In 13:1–20:13, the events took place in and around Kadesh, which was located in "the wilderness of Paran" (12:16; 13:3, 26), "the wilderness of Zin" (13:21; 20:1). From 20:14–22:1, Israel traveled from Kadesh to the "plains of Moab." All the events of 22:2–36:13 occurred while Israel was encamped in the plain to the N of Moab. That plain was a flat and fertile piece of land in the middle of the wasteland (21:20; 23:28; 24:1)." (MSB, 195)

### STRUCTURE OF NUMBERS ("The Discipline of the Nation")

#### PREPARATION FOR THE MARCH

Nm 1:1–10:10

Organization at  
Sinai

#### THE MARCH TO CANAAN

Nm 10:11–21:35

Disorganization *en  
route* to Sinai

#### COMPLETION OF THE MARCH

Nm 22–26

Reorganization in the  
Plains of Moab

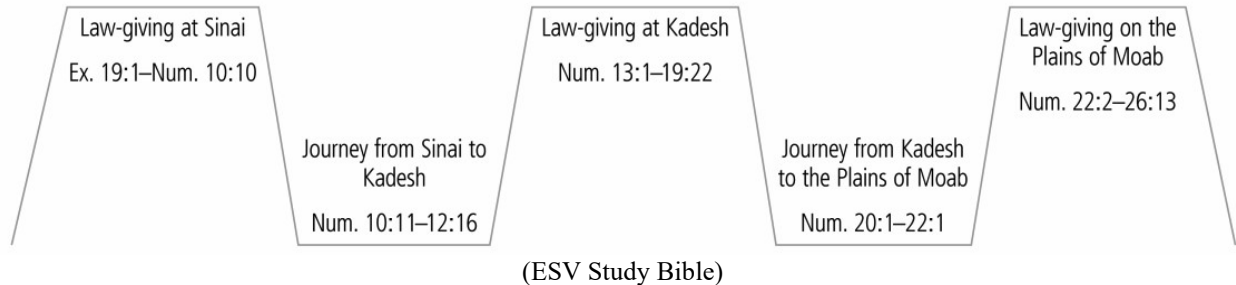
#### THE OLD GENERATION

#### THE NEW GENERATION

Nm 21:10; Dt 2:14<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 405). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.



### Preparation for March (Nm 1:1–10:10)

General agreement exists among scholars that the first major division of Numbers extends from 1:1 through 10:10. The setting of this material is Sinai, the same venue which has been the focus from Exodus 19 through Leviticus. So closely is this unit linked to the second book of the Pentateuch that one scholar has even suggested that that these chapters should be appended to Exodus.

Before leaving Sinai, Israel had to make preparation for the journey. This preparation is evident in (1) the mustering of the tribes and the care of the Tabernacle (chs. 1–4); (2) the enforced purity of the camp (chs. 5–6); (3) the offerings for proper worship (chs. 7–8); (4) the second observance of the Passover (ch. 9); and (5) the signals for service (10:1–10).<sup>11</sup>

### The March (Nm 10:11–22:1)

The long journey from Sinai to Moab is covered in these few chapters. Here is the record of all that is known of the thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering. At best it is only the record of a series of episodes.

1. The journey to the borders of Canaan (10:11–ch.13) included the following episodes: the burning in the camp at Taberah, the sending of quail, the sedition of Miriam and Aaron, and the expedition of the spies with their report.

2. The curse of wandering was pronounced because the nation lost faith in God and refused to enter Canaan (chs. 14–20). The following episodes are narrated: the rebellion of Korah and Dathan; Moses striking the rock; the plague of serpents; and various special enactments.

3. The defeat of Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan (ch. 21) in Transjordan were the first events following emergence from the wandering.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusion of the March (Nm 22:2–36:13)

At the conclusion of the march five episodes are recorded: (1) the efforts of Balaam to destroy Israel (chs. 22–25); (2) the second numbering of the people (ch. 26); (3) the naming of a successor for Moses (chs. 27–30); (4) the triumph over the Midianites and distribution of the Transjordan territory (chs. 31–33); and (5) the directions for settlement in Canaan (chs. 34–36).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., pp. 405–406). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

### Simple Outline

1. The Experience of the First Generation of Israel (1-25)
  - 1.1. Ordering and Obedience (1-10)
  - 1.2. Disobedience and Death (11-25)
2. The Experience of the Second Generation of Israel (26-36)

### Exegetical Outline

- I. The Experience of the First Generation of Israel in the Wilderness (1:1-25:18)
  - A. The Obedience of Israel toward Yahweh at Sinai (1:1-10:36)
    1. The Organization of Israel around the Tabernacle of Yahweh (1:1-6:27)
    2. The Orientation of Israel toward the Tabernacle of Yahweh (7:1-10:36)
  - B. The Disobedience of Israel toward Yahweh in the Wilderness (11:1-22:1)
    1. The Complaining of Israel on the Journey from Sinai to Kadesh (11:1-12:16)
    2. The Rebellion of Israel and Its Leaders at Kadesh (13:1-20:29)
      - a. The Rebellion of Israel and the Consequences (13:1-19:22)
      - b. The Rebellion of Moses and Aaron and the Consequences (20:1-29)
    3. The Renewed Complaining of Israel on the Journey from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (21:1-22:1)
  - C. The Final Rebellion of Israel with Baal of Peor on the Plains of Moab (22:2-25:18)
    1. The Blessing of Israel by Balaam: Yahweh Will Fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant through a Future King from Jacob (22:2-24:25)
    2. The Covenant of an Everlasting Priesthood: The Seed of Phinehas (25:1-18)
- II. The Experience of the Second Generation of Israel on the Plains of Moab: The Renewed Obedience of Israel toward Yahweh (26:1-36:13)
  - A. The Preparations for the Conquest of the Land (26:1-33:49)

## B. The Anticipation of the Conquest of the Land (33:50-36:13)

### Major Themes in Numbers [see NIDOTTE, 4:985-91]

1. The Wilderness (1, 3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 32, 34)
2. The Rebellion of Israel (11, 12, \*14, 15, 16, \*20, 21, \*25)
3. The Wrath of God toward His Disobedient People (11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 25)
4. The Blessing of God through Balaam (23-24) [NIDOTTE 4:436-7]
5. The Numbers: The Glory and Grace of Yahweh (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 14, 26)
6. The Old and the New: the Patience of Yahweh (1-10; 26-36)
7. The Land (9:14; 10:9; 13-15; 16:14; 18:20; 20:12, 24; 26:53, 55; 32:7-9, 11; 33:50-56; 34-36)

### The Purpose of Numbers:

~ Numbers highlights how the failure of Israel to obey Yahweh in faith brought Yahweh's discipline by death, but it did not frustrate Yahweh's ultimate purpose to bless Israel. Therefore, Numbers chronicles the failure of Israel to obey the Lord by faith and enter the Promised Land, the consequent discipline of the Lord bringing about the death of that entire generation of Israel during thirty-eight years (Dt 2:14) of wilderness wandering, and the preparation of the next generation of Israel to enter the Land.

~ The English Standard Version Study Bible (ESVSB) says, "Numbers is the fourth volume in this series and relates Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land, summarizing some 40 years of the nation's history. The book begins with Israel making final preparations to leave Sinai. It then records their triumphal setting out, before relating a series of disasters in which the people grumbled about the difficulty of the journey and the impossibility of conquering Canaan. This response leads to God delaying the entry to Canaan by 40 years. The closing chapters of the book tell how the people at last set out again and reached the banks of the Jordan, poised to cross into the land promised to their forefathers.

~ Numbers thus relates a most important stage in the early history of Israel. Genesis begins with the creation of the world, but soon focuses on the life of the patriarchs and ends with their move to Egypt. Exodus tells how they left Egypt and came to Sinai to receive the law. Leviticus contains some of these laws, and Numbers still more. Numbers also summarizes the 40 years in the wilderness, and Deuteronomy (the sequel to Numbers) has Moses expounding the laws and urging the people to obey them. Deuteronomy ends with Moses' death."<sup>14</sup>

~ That Numbers derives its ultimate significance within the framework and context of the greater

<sup>14</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 257). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Pentateuch cannot be denied. That the book has no special significance peculiar to itself must be resisted. The canonical process has maintained the integrity of Numbers as a distinct book. The legal content of the book clearly sets it apart from Leviticus. Numbers focuses on the laws of Israel while on the march. Only in this book are found the military order of the tribes, the census of the fighting force, and the travel duties of Levites. Leviticus emphasizes the believer's worship and purity; Numbers, the believer's walk and pilgrimage. Numbers begins with a date formula indicating a new section of material, and concludes with a summary which sets it apart from the following book.<sup>15</sup>

### **Selected Interpretive Problems in Numbers:**

1. The Literary Structure [DOTP, 611-8]
  - a. Geographical [Ashley; Wenham]
    - Sinai (1:1-10:10)
    - From Sinai to the Plains of Moab (10:11-22:1)
    - The Plains of Moab (22:2-36:13)
  - b. Ideological [Cole; EBC]
    - The End of the Old: The First Generation of God's People Die in the Wilderness (1:1-25:18)
    - The Birth of the New: The Second Generation of God's People Prepare to Enter the Promised Land (26:1-36:13)
  - c. Combination of Geographical/Ideological [Gane]
  
2. The Large Numbers in 1:2-46; 2:1-34; 26:1-65 {see also Ex. 12:37; 38:26} (cf. 3:39-51; Ex. 23:25-30; Deut. 7:7-22) [MSB, 196-8, 233; ESVSB, 260-1; DOTP, 407-10]
  - a. Literal and Precise
    - 1) The Wilderness Generation [KD; BKC]
    - 2) The Davidic Generation
  - b. Gematria
  - c. Different Meaning for *'elep* [see NIDOTTE, 1:416-8]
    - 1) "A Military Unit"
    - 2) "Clan"
    - 3) "Chief"
  - d. Symbolic [Wenham(?)]
  - e. Deliberate Hyperbole [EBC]
  - f. Numbers Based on a System Familiar to the Readers but Unknown Now [Ashley; Gane (?)]
  - g. Textual Corruption

~ The MSB is helpful here and says one of the interpretive issues "...deals with the large numbers given for the tribes of Israel in 1:46 and 26:51. These two lists of Israel's men of war, taken 39 years apart, both put the number over 600,000. These numbers demand a total population for Israel in the wilderness of around 2.5 million at any one time. From a natural perspective, this total seems too high for the wilderness conditions to sustain. However, it must

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [\*The Pentateuch\*](#) (2nd ed., p. 404). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

be recognized that the Lord supernaturally took care of Israel for 40 years (Deut. 8:1–5). Therefore, the large numbers must be accepted at face value.” (MSB 196)

3. Balaam (22:2-24:25; 31:16) [MSB, 196; ESVSB, 301; DOTP, 75-8]
  - a. A Prophet of Yahweh
  - b. A False Prophet (cf. 2 Pet. 2:15, 16; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14) [Cole; Wenham; EBC]
  - c. Balaam’s Character Incidental to the Narrative; This Text Gives a Neutral Judgment [Ashley]

~ Again the MSB is clear because the Bible is about Balaam. “The interpretive challenge concerns the heathen prophet Balaam, whose story is recorded in 22:2–24:25. Even though Balaam claimed to know the Lord (22:18), Scripture consistently refers to him as a false prophet (2 Pet. 2:15, 16, Jude 11). The Lord used Balaam as His mouthpiece to speak the true words He put in his mouth.” (MSB, 196)

### **The Overview of Numbers:**

The book of Numbers is quite interesting as it chronicles the journey of Israel from the base of Mt. Sinai to the plains of Moab which takes place over roughly a thirty-eight-year period. This fourth book of the Pentateuch is different from the previous three in that it also, toward the end, introduces and interacts with the second generation of Israelites since the Egyptian deliverance. Yet, one of the major lessons to be gleaned from this book is found in grappling with what it teaches about Israel’s obedience and disobedience to Yahweh and Yahweh’s response to Israel. As one wrestles with Israel’s inconsistent response to God’s commands he realizes that her obedience was circumstantial, flowed from an uncircumcised heart, and was above all else not of faith. Furthermore, Numbers illustrates the ramifications of God’s response as Yahweh disciplines Israel, rejects Israel, and yet, still remembers His covenant with Israel.

#### *Israel’s Obedience was Clearly Circumstantial*

The first lesson Numbers teaches about Israel’s obedience and disobedience to Yahweh is the reality that their obedience was clearly circumstantial even though this truth is not grasped until chapter 11. This book actually starts by vividly elucidating Israel’s obedience to the commands Yahweh gave concerning the arrangement of the camp as it surrounded the Tabernacle (Num. 1-6) and then their obedience as they personally interacted with the Tabernacle (Num. 7-10). Israel’s obedience jumps off the pages of the first ten chapters of Numbers where the text declares emphatically that Israel did all that God commanded (1:53-54, 2:34, 3:51, 5:4, 7, 8:20,

9:23). Though the early days at Mt. Sinai had been filled with idolatrous sin against Yahweh (Ex.32), things have changed now, as a year later Israel stands together unified ready to obey the Lord (Num.1:54) as the Lord gets them ready to conquer the land (Num.1).

However, while the beginning of Numbers displays Israel's obedience to the Lord during those last three to four months they were camped at Sinai, it goes on to sadly explain Israel's terrible disobedience and rebellion as they journeyed toward Kadesh (Num.11-12) and wander through the wilderness (Num.13-25). The transition from their obedience to disobedience is understood as one makes the connection between the difficult situations they faced when they left Sinai and the subsequent disobedience they displayed. Their obedience demonstrated in chapters 1-10 was proven to be simply circumstantial in chapters 11-25 where they willfully rebelled against the will of God. The circumstantial nature of Israel's obedience is clearly illustrated as hard times and misfortune came upon the Israelites they would disobey, complain, and rebel against the sovereign, gracious hand of Yahweh (Num.11,13-14).

#### *Israel's Obedience Flowed from an Uncircumcised Heart*

Another lesson that Numbers teaches concerning Israel's obedience is that it flowed from an uncircumcised or unchanged heart as their obedience was simply external. No one will deny what chapters 1-10 express about the reality of Israel's obedience to all that God commanded. Yet, why did their obedience not continue as a pattern of their life instead of simply being a small part of their life? Therefore, it is interesting to evaluate the attitude of Israel before she made it to Sinai as revealed in Exodus and then calculate her mindset after leaving God's holy mountain as expressed in Numbers. This investigation sadly elucidates the fact that Israel never changed from the time they left Egypt until the time she left Sinai. Consider how she complained at the Red Sea, grumbled about food and water, and adulterated with the golden calf (Ex.14, 15-17,32). Now, contemplate Israel's disobedience as declared in Numbers which takes place after they have left Sinai where they complain about the food, grumble about those that occupy the land, and adulterate with Baal of Peor (Num.11,13-14,25).

#### *Israel's Obedience was not of Faith*

Furthermore, Numbers also reveals that Israel's obedience was not of faith because as she was

divinely tested (Ex.16:4) through her trials she sinfully responded by not trusting in all that God had promised (Num.11-14). The clearest indicator of this reality is revealed in Israel's disobedient reaction to the different reports given by the twelve spies. While it was true that the land was filled with giants and fortified cities (Num.13:28) it was also true that God had already promised to give them this land in spite of its inhabitants. Yahweh has proven His faithfulness to them in the past which should have brought tangible validity to His promise of faithfulness to them for the future no matter how large or seemingly impenetrable the obstacle is they must face. It was to this truth that Caleb and Joshua appealed to as they tried to correct the false perspective of the ten faithless spies and to exhort the faithlessness of Israel in her unwillingness to trust and obey Yahweh (Num.13:30; 14:6-9).

### *God Disciplines Israel in Her Rebellion*

While Numbers does teach lessons about Israel's obedience and disobedience to Yahweh it also instructs the reader of the Torah about the ramifications brought upon Israel through God's response to her obedience and disobedience. The first ten chapters express God's blessing on Israel because of her obedience through His divine presence dwelling in their midst (Num.9:15-23). However, as Israel sinned, as expressed in chapters 11-25, one sees God responding to their rebellion in removing His consistent presence within the camp and mitigating divine discipline upon His disobedient people (Num.12:10;14:10,25;16:19). In Numbers eleven the people complained about their misfortunes and God sent fire to consume those who lived on the outskirts of the camp (Num11:1-3). Then they murmured about their food so God gave them what they wanted as He providentially provided meat for them to eat (Num.11:31-32). Yet, while it was still within their teeth He sends a plague which consumes many within the camp (Num.11:33-34). His discipline was even given to specific people because of their personal sin such as Miriam and Aaron because of their opposition to Moses (Num.12:1-11) as well as Korah and his cohort who sought to replace the leadership of Moses (Num.16:31-35).

### *God Rejects the Rebellious 1<sup>st</sup> Generation of Israel*

However, the saddest ramification of Israel's disobedience as seen through God's response would be Yahweh's rejection of the first generation of Israel. Though Israel obeyed the Lord while at Sinai, she quickly began to exemplify her pattern of persistent sin and rebellion within

days of departing from God's holy mountain. There is a sense in which Israel's sin escalates to the point of open mutiny against Moses and the Lord at Kadesh when the spies brought back their report about the land (Num.13-14). This ushers God's response of direct punishment in killing those who brought the bad report (Num.14:37) and completely rejecting the whole generation, who believed the divisive words, from entering the promise land (Num.14:20-35) except Joshua and Caleb (Num.14:30). No longer would God's chosen people have the hope and encouragement of rest and peace found within Yahweh's past promise of prosperity because of His present declaration of His rejection of them because of their personal disobedience.

*God Remains Faithful to His Covenant with Israel*

The final lesson gleaned from Numbers, as it pertains to Yahweh's response to Israel's disobedience, is one of encouragement, because, in spite of Israel's faithlessness God remains faithful to His covenant. Though God personally disciplined Israel for their sin and eventually rejected the first generation from entering the land because of their persistent rebellion, He would ultimately, positively respond to Israel by remembering the covenant promise He made to Abraham. This is demonstrated quite vividly in the Scriptures as immediately following God's clear judgment of rejecting the first generation (Num.14) God speaks to the people about the procedures and laws for offering sacrifices in the promise land which He declares they will eventually enter (Num.15). God also made it clear during His judgment that though this first generation was rejected He would still bring their children into the land which He had previously promised to give them (Num.14:31). This truth of God remembering His promise and providing the land to the second generation of Israel starts to become reality in the latter portion of the book of Numbers (Num.26-36). Furthermore, this truth of God's faithfulness to His Word is an important lesson to learn as it illustrates the consistent character of God in spite of the inconstancies of his people.

**Seeing Numbers through Crisis:**

~ Dr. James Smith highlights an interesting perspective on tracing some of the content of Numbers through specific action points of crisis either with the nation or with the leadership of Moses and Aaron. He says, "The action of Numbers revolves around seven crises:

1. A leadership crisis. Miriam and Aaron questioned the authority of Moses (ch. 12).

2. A faith crisis. At Kadesh the people believed the reports of the ten spies and refused to trust God for victory in Canaan (chs. 13–14).

3. A second leadership crisis. The leadership of Moses and Aaron was challenged by Dathan and Korah and their followers (ch. 16).

4. A personal crisis. Moses arrogantly and angrily smote a rock when he was but to speak to it. The people received water from the rock, but Moses lost the opportunity to lead his people into Canaan (ch. 20).

5. A program crisis. When they were not permitted to pass through the land of Edom, Israel was forced to take a detour through the desert. Poisonous snakes in the region caused havoc and death (ch. 21)

6. A military crisis. Israelite soldiers were forced to go to war against walled cities in Transjordan for the first time (ch. 21).

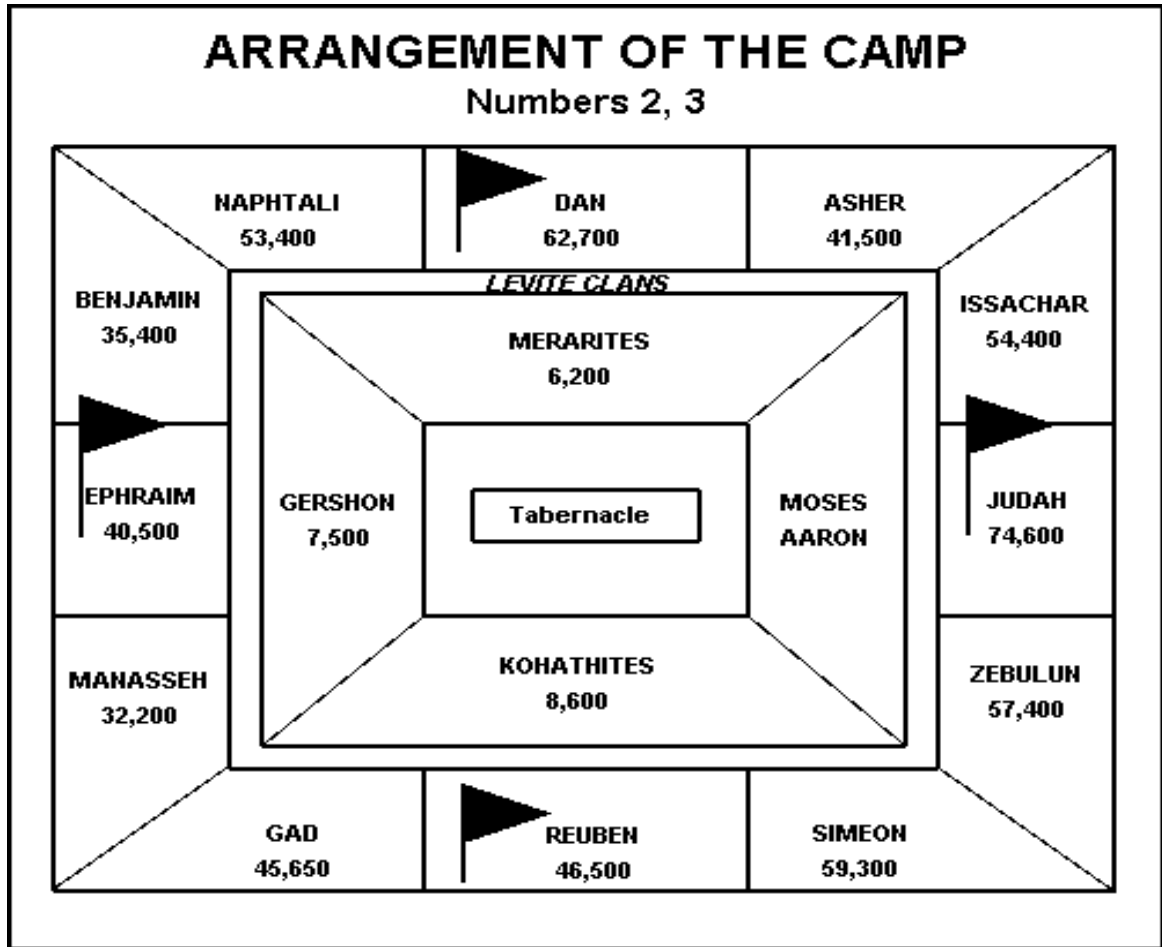
7. A religious crisis. Balak king of Moab used beautiful temptresses to lure the men of Israel into Baal worship at Peor (ch. 25).<sup>16</sup>

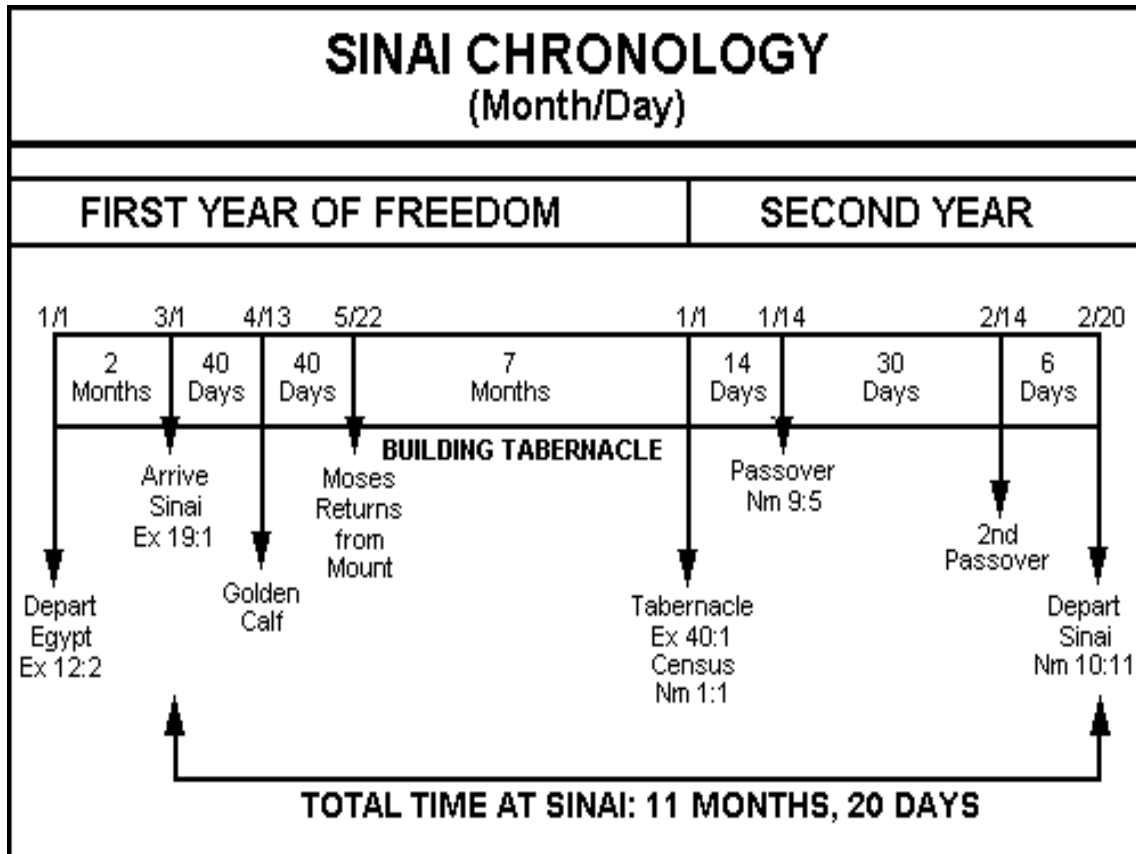
### **The Major Events in Numbers:**

1. The Ordering of the Nation (Num1-10). This is where Numbers begins with the organizing and numbering of the nation (Num 1-2), the arranging of the camp and the structuring of the Levites (Num 3-4), and protection of the people (5-6), the offerings and plan for worship (Num 7-8), the Passover and marching orders (Num 9-10).

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [\*The Pentateuch\*](#) (2nd ed., pp. 407–408). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.





2. The People Complain about Hard Travels. (Num 11) Apparently Israel had traveled for only three days when the complaints started. The people grumbled about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, i.e., publicly, and he was moved to anger against them. Fire from the Lord began to consume them on the fringes of the camp. In other words, God unleashed a tremendous lightning storm over Israel. Yet God's mercy is manifest even in judgment, for only the outskirts of the camp were destroyed. Nonetheless, Moses went to God in prayer on behalf of the people and the punishment ceased. The spot was given the name Taberah ("burning").<sup>17</sup>

3. The People Complain about the Food. (Num 11) The second crisis after leaving Sinai was triggered by the mixed multitude who had joined Israel in the Exodus. They had become dissatisfied with the diet of manna. They craved meat and the fresh vegetables which they had enjoyed in Egypt. Why the Israelites did not slaughter some of the flocks and herds which accompanied them out of Egypt is not stated. In any case, their contempt for the manna ("this manna") is quite clear (11:4-9).<sup>18</sup> By means of wind currents, God disrupted the migratory pattern of quails. The wind forced the birds down all around the camp to within three feet of the ground where they were easily captured with nets. No family gathered less than ten homers

<sup>17</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 428). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 428). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

(about sixty bushels). Following Egyptian custom they spread the catch out around the camp to dry in the sun. Some apparently could not wait until the meat was ready. While the meat was still between their teeth God smote them with a plague. The spot was named Kibroth Hattaavah, “graves of greed” (11:31–34).<sup>19</sup>

4. The People Complain about Moses. (Num 12) Miriam and Aaron begin to harshly judge and serve as critics to Moses and his leadership which does sit well with Yahweh. God intervened in the crisis by calling the three leaders to the door of the tent. This is the only instance where the Lord spoke “at once” or immediately. He was quick to defend his servant Moses. In the pillar of cloud the Lord came down and stood there. He directed Aaron and Miriam to take one step forward (12:4–5).<sup>20</sup> The anger of Yahweh burned against Aaron and Miriam. When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. This indicates that Miriam was the instigator of this act of rebellion. Aaron got off with a fright as is indicated by the structure of the Hebrew sentence. He turned to Moses and begged him not to “hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.” Perhaps to evoke Moses’ sympathy, Aaron compared his sister to a child who suffered from a fatal disease when it is born (12:9–12).<sup>21</sup> Moses earnestly interceded for his sister and God healed her but she had to be sent outside of the camp for a week per God’s Law.

5. The People Complain about the Spies Report. (Num 13-14) The spies explored the entire length of Canaan as far north as Rehob and the entrance of Hamath. Debate over the geography of the exploration of Canaan continues. About all that can be said is that Rehob and the entrance of Hamath were very near what would later be the northern border of Israel’s territory. The spies returned after forty days, carrying a cluster of grapes from the Valley of Eshcol and other fruits of the land as well (13:21–24).<sup>22</sup> The majority report of the spies sent a shock wave through the camp. The people wept aloud all night. They murmured against Moses and Aaron. Better to die in the wilderness than to face those giants! In the agony of their soul they cried out “Why?” They accused the Lord of all kinds of sinister plans to kill them. They were ready to return to Egypt! Since they knew Moses would never agree to that, they were fully prepared to select another leader and depart (14:1–4).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [The Pentateuch](#) (2nd ed., p. 429). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [The Pentateuch](#) (2nd ed., p. 430). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [The Pentateuch](#) (2nd ed., pp. 430–431). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [The Pentateuch](#) (2nd ed., pp. 431–433). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). [The Pentateuch](#) (2nd ed., p. 433). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

### The Journey of the Spies

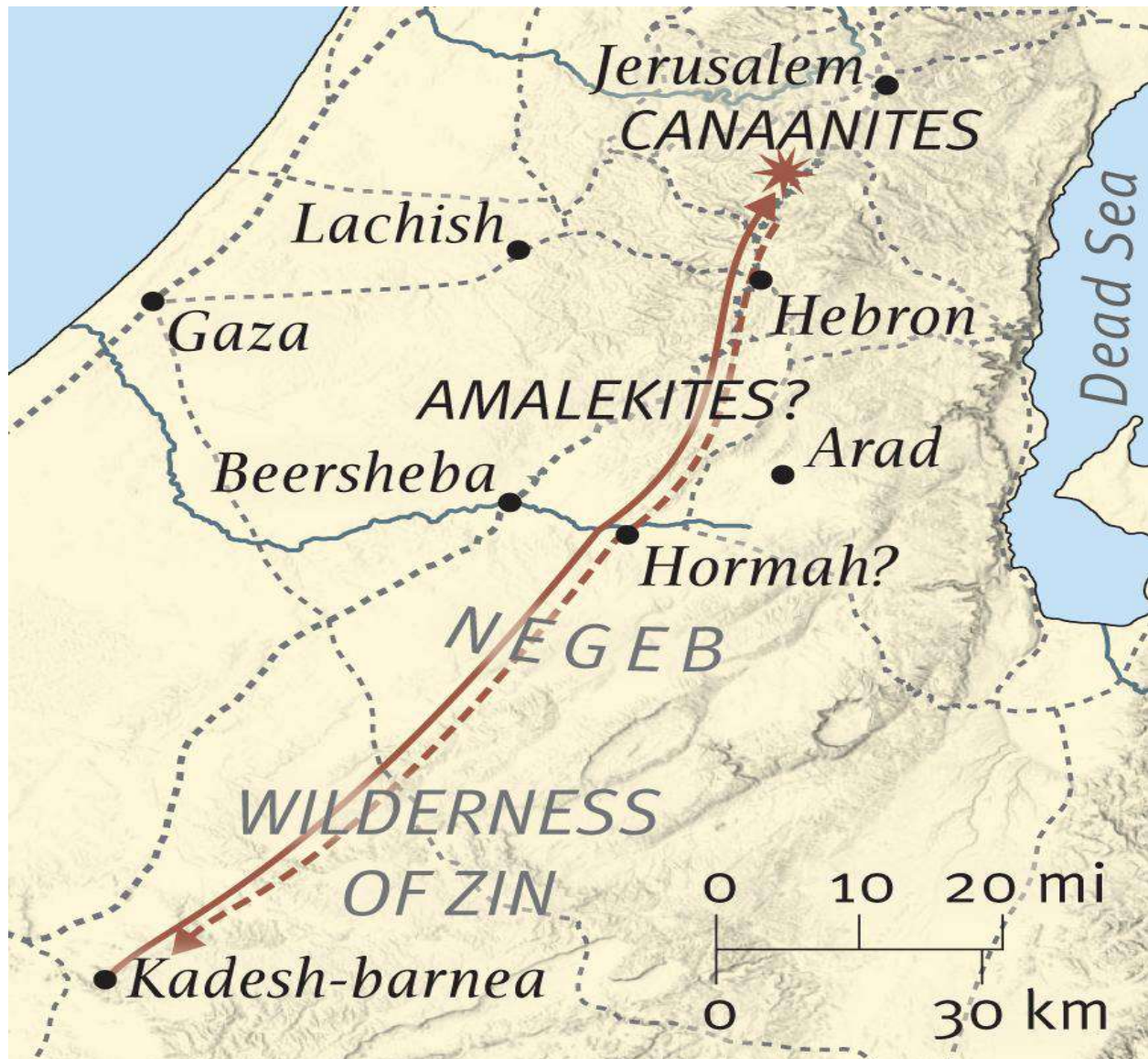
When the Israelites first arrived at Kadesh-barnea, Moses dispatched 12 spies to scout out the Promised Land of Canaan. For 40 days the spies traveled throughout Canaan, from the Negeb to Rehob and back again—a distance of over 500 miles (805 km).<sup>24</sup>



<sup>24</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 286). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

### The Failed Entry into Canaan

After the Lord had condemned the people for refusing to enter Canaan, a group of Israelites changed their mind and tried to go up, even though neither Moses nor the ark of the covenant went with them. When they reached the hill country, they were beaten back by the Amalekites and Canaanites, who chased them all the way to Hormah.<sup>25</sup>



6. The Complaints of Korah, Dathan, and Abriam (Num 16) This story heads a section concerned with demonstrating the privileges and mediatorial role of the priesthood. It begins with Korah overemphasizing one truth to the exclusion of others (which is what heretics and founders of cults commonly do). He claims that since “all in the congregation are holy,” all have equal access to God (v. 3). As a result, he and his followers demand that they should have all the

<sup>25</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 288). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

privileges of priests, to enter God’s presence in the tabernacle itself. But God judged them swiftly, and the final episode ends with all the people crying out in fear, “we perish,” and, “Everyone who comes near ... to the tabernacle ... shall die” (17:12, 13). They have learned that only the priests may approach the tabernacle, and this protects the rest of the nation from death. This is outlined in the laws of ch. 18, which explain how the tribe of Levi has this vital role (18:1–7), and that the tithes and sacrificial portions that they receive are a reward for their important and dangerous service (18:8–32).<sup>26</sup>

~ At some point during the Kadesh encampment Moses and Aaron faced a serious challenge to their leadership. The dissidents were Korah, a Levite, and Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben. These rebels were joined by 250 princes. Korah wished to abolish the distinction between priests (family of Aaron) and the rest of the tribe of Levi. The Reubenites apparently felt that they had a claim to the priesthood over the tribe of Levi because they were descendants of the firstborn of Jacob (16:1–2).<sup>27</sup> God judges them all as the ground opens up and swallows them and fire from heaven came and destroyed the 250 men who partakers in the rebellion (Num 16:31-35).

7. Complaints about the Water at Meribah (Num 20) Complaints about lack of water characterized the journey from the Red Sea to Sinai (Ex. 15:22–27; 17:1–7), and now they occur again. In both situations Moses struck the rock with his staff. This is what he had been told to do in Ex. 17:6, but on this second occasion he had been told to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8). This deviation from carrying out God’s instruction led to Moses’ being condemned not to **bring this assembly into the land** (v. 12). Since this seems like a minor error, it has been suggested that it was Moses’ anger (see v. 10) to which God took exception. But v. 12 seems to make it clear that it was carelessness in attending to God’s command that was the real issue: **Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people**. As the prime mediators of God’s laws to Israel, Moses and Aaron had to be exemplary in their obedience. Their failure to follow the divine instruction exactly led to their forfeiting their right to enter Canaan. Some have suggested that another factor was involved: since God had told Moses in the earlier incident, “I will stand before you there on the rock” (Ex. 17:6), Moses should have known that God was present here on the rock as well; therefore Moses’ speaking to the rock (Num. 20:8) would be actually speaking to God, and therefore when Moses **struck the rock with his staff twice** (v. 11), it was a serious manifestation of anger against God, and it is not surprising that God punished Moses severely (cf. note on 1 Cor. 10:3–4). Others hold that the emphasis here is on the difference between what God commanded and what Moses did; usually Moses did just what God commanded him, but not here. It was similar carelessness by Aaron’s sons that led to their death in Lev. 10:1–3. The phraseology of Num. 20:12 also echoes that of the spy story, where God complains, “How long will they not believe in me?” (14:11). The people’s unbelief led to their exclusion from the land; so did Aaron’s and Moses’ unbelief. **Meribah** means “quarreling.” In Ex. 17:7, Rephidim was also nicknamed Meribah (see also Ps. 95:8).<sup>28</sup>

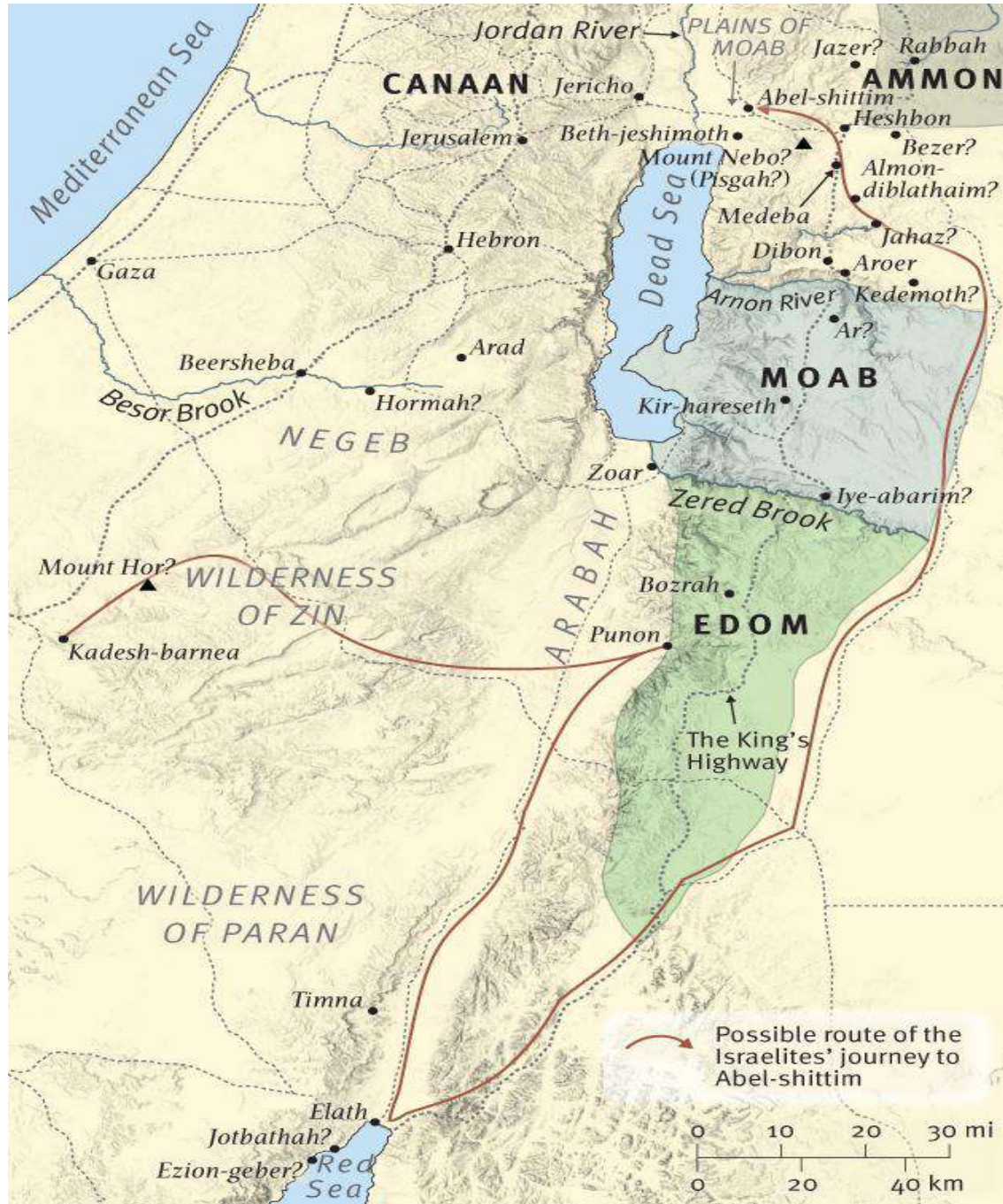
<sup>26</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 290–291). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 436). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>28</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 297). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

### The Journey to Canaan

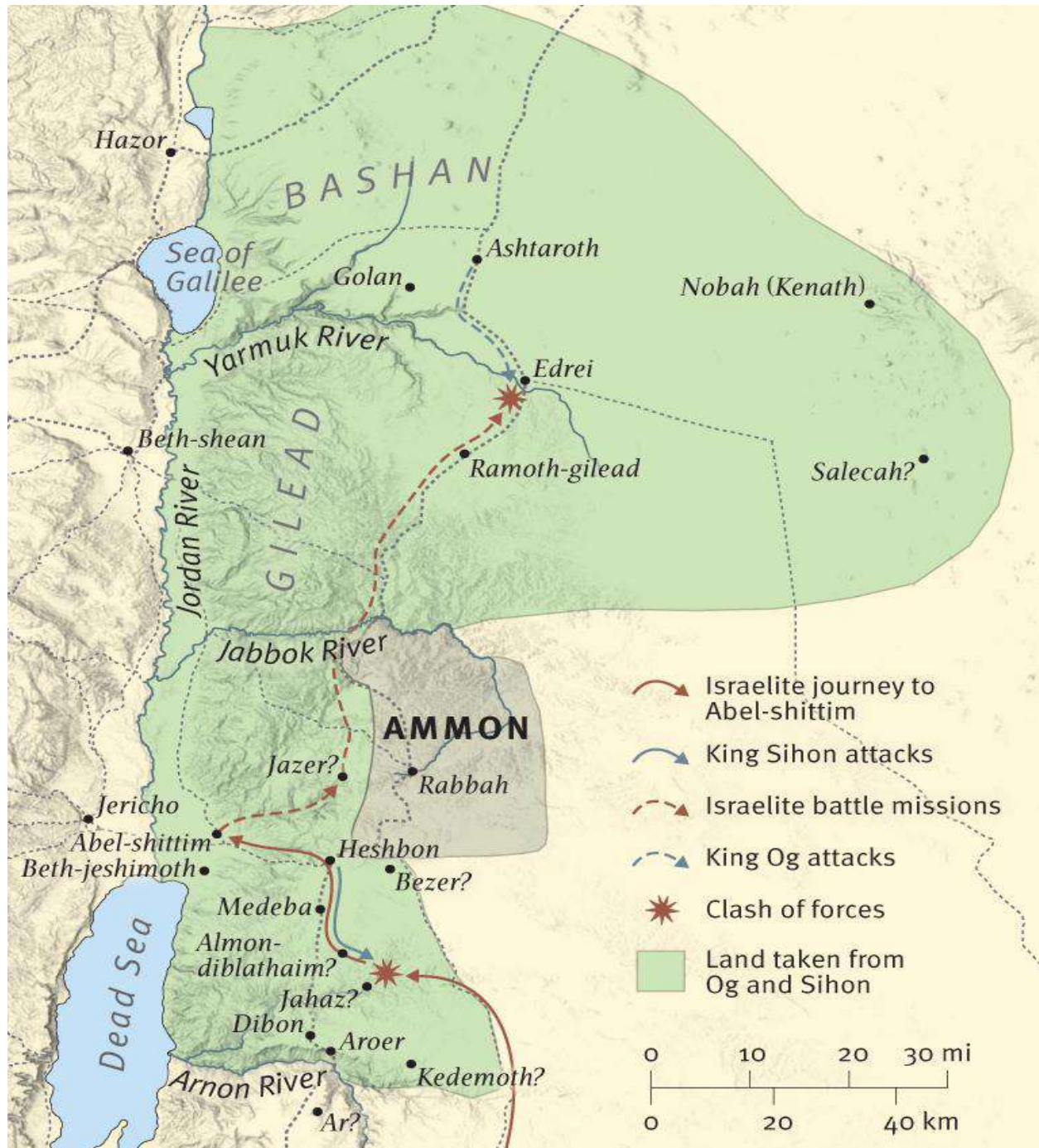
It is difficult to know for certain the exact route the Israelites took from Kadesh-barnea to the plains of Moab, but it is possible that they followed a course shown here, going around the lands of Edom and Moab along a desert route after they were refused passage through them.<sup>29</sup>



<sup>29</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 296). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

### Israel Defeats Og and Sihon (Num 21 and Dt 3)

As with Edom and Moab, the Israelites asked permission to pass through the territory of King Sihon, but he refused. When Sihon attacked the Israelites at Jahaz, the Israelites defeated him and captured his land. Later, Moses dispatched troops to capture Jazer, and then they turned north and were met by King Og's forces. They defeated Og's forces and took control of his land as well.<sup>30</sup>



<sup>30</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 300). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

8. The People Complain about Food Again (Num 21:4-9) A new day may have dawned, but old habits are not eradicated. The people once again grumble about their food and are punished: this time by poisonous snakes. As an antidote, Moses makes a bronze snake, which cures anyone who looks at it. The Hebrew term translated “bronze” can also mean “copper” (see ESV footnote). The area through which the Israelites were traveling had copper mines, and archaeologists have found a 5-inch-long (13 cm) copper snake in a Midianite shrine at Timna, so it seems likely that copper is meant here. The redness of copper suggested atonement (see 19:1–10), so symbolically it was well chosen for this occasion. Jesus compares his own death on the cross to the uplifted serpent (John 3:14–15). By the time of King Hezekiah of Judah (c. 715 B.C.), this copper serpent had become an object of worship among the Israelites and had to be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).<sup>31</sup>

9. Balaam the two faced prophet (Num 22-24) Balaam is a perplexing character! He was a non-Israelite, yet he knew the Lord. He was a soothsayer, yet he uttered some of the most magnificent prophecies in the Bible. He faithfully proclaimed God’s word, yet was responsible for leading Israel into immorality. Balaam was brought into the action by Balak the king of Moab. Having seen how Israel had crushed Sihon and Og, Balak feared that Moab would be next. The Israelites were at this time camped in the plains of Moab across from Jericho. Balak and his allies the Midianites decided to resort to magic in their effort to thwart the advance of God’s people (21:1–4).<sup>32</sup>

~ The first three attempts to persuade Balaam to curse Israel follow a similar pattern, though there are some significant deviations in the third. First, Balak takes Balaam to various high points in order to view Israel: Bamoth-baal (22:41), Pisgah (23:14), and Peor (23:28). Second, seven altars are built and seven bulls and rams are sacrificed at each place (23:1–2, 14, 29–30). Third, Balaam tells Balak to stay by the altars while he goes elsewhere to meet the Lord (23:3–5, 15–16), but on the third occasion the Spirit of God descends on him then and there (24:1–2). Fourth, Balaam pronounces a long, three-part blessing on Israel: the first two address Israel’s wilderness situation, but the third looks forward to an Israelite king (23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9). Fifth, Balak reacts angrily to the blessing (23:11, 25; 24:10–11). Sixth, Balaam reasserts that he only has said what the Lord has told him (23:12, 26; 24:12–13). This pattern reinforces the point that Balaam’s words, which are the opposite of what he was hired to say, are inspired by God and therefore must be reliable.<sup>33</sup>

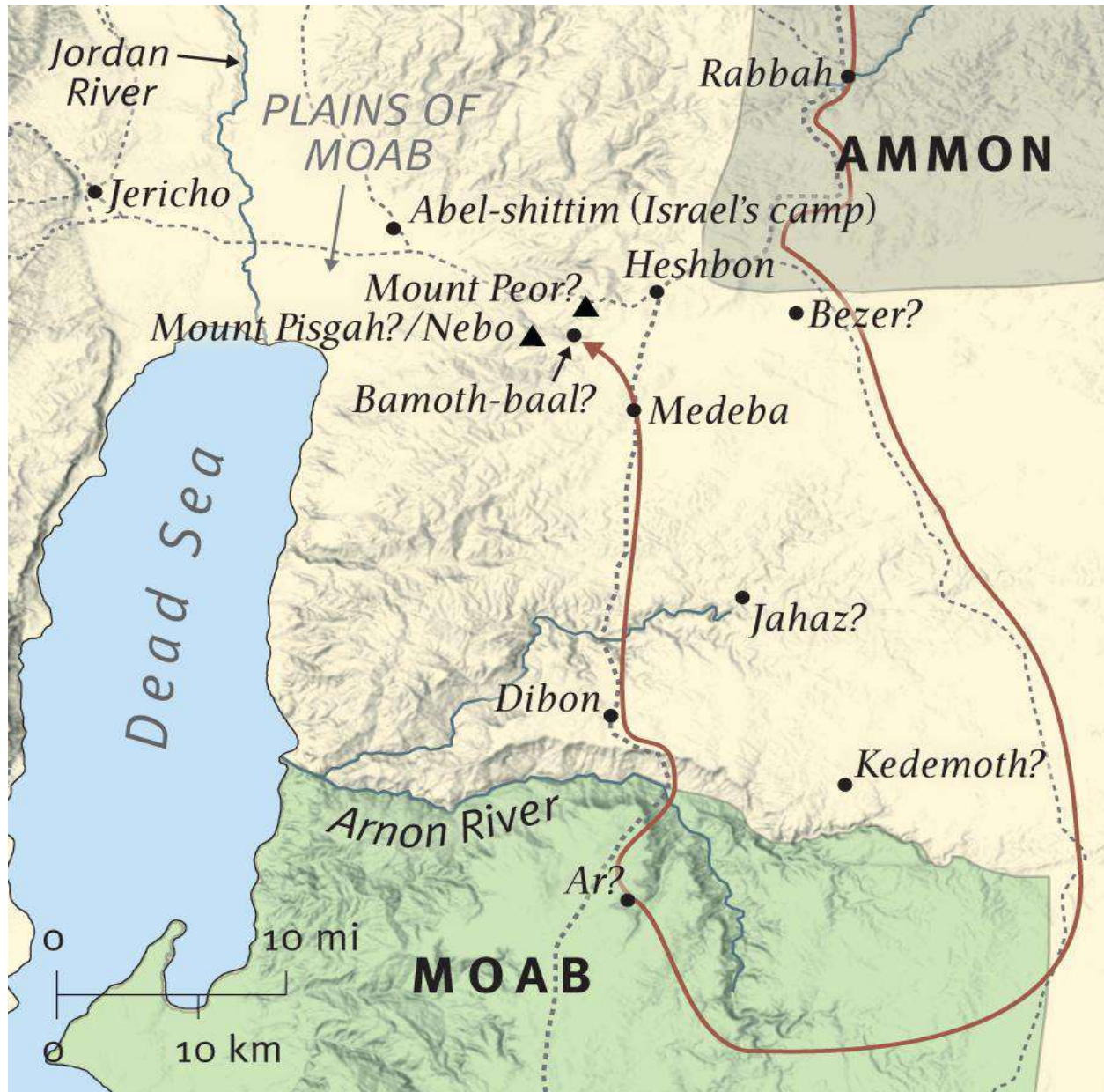
<sup>31</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 298–299). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 449). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

<sup>33</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 303). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

### Balaam Blesses Israel

Concerned that the vast number of Israelites would overwhelm his land, King Balak of Moab summoned Balaam to come and curse them. Balaam traveled from the region of the Euphrates River, and Balak went out to meet him at a city on the Arnon River at the border of his land. Balak took Balaam to Bamoth-baal, Pisgah, and Peor to curse the Israelites, but each time Balaam blessed them.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>34</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 303). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

10. The Apostasy of Peor (Num 25) Balaam had delivered his final oracles at Peor (23:28). Now, at the foot of the mountain where Balaam had been prophesying, the Israelites start “whoring with the daughters of Moab” and sacrificing to their gods. The juxtaposition could not be more stark between the most exuberant visions of Israel’s future and their present blatant infidelity to the law and the covenant. But this sort of inconsistency was not new. The same thing had happened at Sinai: while Moses was being given instructions on building the tabernacle, the people were making and worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 25–34). And at Kadesh the wonderful prospect of entry to the land was dashed by national unbelief (Numbers 13–14). These earlier episodes are alluded to here in ch. 25, and various details in this apostasy parallel earlier ones (e.g., the plagues, the consecration of the Levites/priest). What is missing here is the threat to destroy the whole nation or delay the entry to Canaan. God’s plan is going to be implemented despite Israel’s unfaithfulness. As Deut. 9:5 puts it, “Not because of your righteousness ... are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations ... that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers.”<sup>35</sup>

~ Drastic action (execution) was the only possible way to obliterate the perversion of **Baal** worship (v. 2) and the accompanying prostitution with the daughters of Moab (v. 1), and so to assuage the Lord’s fierce anger. **hang them in the sun**. This most likely refers to the ancient Near Eastern practice of impaling dead bodies on a stick after execution for heinous crimes, as a form of disgrace (rather than burying the bodies) and as a public warning to all who would be tempted to engage in such perversion themselves.

**25:6** Publicly flouting this ban on liaisons with foreign women, a chief’s son (v. 14) takes a **Midianite** princess (v. 15) into a tent near the tabernacle. Moabites and Midianites collaborated in hiring Balaam (22:4, 7), and evidently in the seduction of Israel also.

**25:7–8 Phinehas**, the high priest’s son, goes after the chief’s son and the princess (see v. 6) and executes them on the spot, perhaps in the very act of intercourse. This punishment without waiting for a trial corresponds to the Levites’ slaughter of the golden calf worshipers (Ex. 32:25–28). In the case of the Levites, this led to their being set apart as the priestly tribe (Ex. 32:29). For his part, Phinehas was rewarded with heading a permanent priestly dynasty (Num. 25:10–13). Phinehas’s grandfather **Aaron** had halted a **plague** by offering incense (16:46–50).

**25:9** Though the **plague** was stopped by Phinehas’s intervention (its start is hinted at in v. 3), still a huge number died. This parallels the plagues at Sinai and Kadesh (Ex. 32:35; Num. 14:37; 16:49).<sup>36</sup>

11. The Second Census Taken (Num 26) The later chapters of Numbers are all concerned with Israel’s future life in Canaan. Balaam has predicted a secure and prosperous future there. This census deals with establishing the relative size of the tribes so that they may each be given an appropriately sized holding (vv. 53–54). The first census (ch. 1) was primarily concerned with establishing the number of fighting men, but this issue is mentioned only once in this second census (in 26:2). The issue of territory probably also explains why the second census is so interested in the clans that make up each tribe—which are hardly mentioned in ch. 1. The total number of Israelites has changed very little between the censuses: 603,550 (first) and 601,730 (second). Even

<sup>35</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 306). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>36</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 306–307). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

though the total may be similar, 26:64–65 stresses that the people being counted are quite different: only Joshua and Caleb figure in both totals. The tribal totals vary somewhat more than the overall total, but the most striking change is the fall in Simeon's total from 59,300 to 22,200 and the increase in Manasseh's from 32,200 to 52,700. The fall in Simeon's numbers could be partly due to the plague caused by Zimri, the Simeonite (25:9, 14), but there is no obvious explanation for the increase in Manasseh. (On interpreting the census numbers, see note on 1:20–46.)<sup>37</sup>

**CENSUS FIGURES**  
**Numbers 1, 2, 26**

TRIBE	BEFORE THE WANDERINGS	AFTER THE WANDERINGS	DIFFERENCE	%
REUBEN	46,500	43,730	-2,770	-06%
SIMEON	59,300	22,200	-37,100	-63%
GAD	45,650	40,500	-5,150	-11%
JUDAH	74,600	76,500	+1,900	+2.5%
ISSACHAR	54,400	64,300	+9,900	+18%
ZEBULUN	57,400	60,500	+3,100	+5.5%
EPHRAIM	40,500	32,500	-8,000	-20%
MANASSEH	32,200	52,700	+20,500	+63%
BENJAMIN	35,400	45,600	+10,200	+29%
DAN	62,700	64,400	+1,700	+2.5%
ASHER	41,500	53,400	+11,900	+28%
NAPHTALI	53,400	45,400	-8,000	-15%
TOTALS	603,550	601,730	-1,820	-.3% <sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 307). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 460). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

~ Chapters 28-29 detail the calendar and procedure for public sacrifices: The ESVSB notes here are very helpful. “Although Moses’ days as mediator of revelation are numbered, he still is God’s chosen vessel to pass on law to Israel. First among his final instructions are laws about public sacrifices (cf. other calendars, Ex. 23:10–19; 34:18–26; Leviticus 23; Deut. 16:1–17; cf. also *The Hebrew Calendar*). These are the sacrifices offered in the tabernacle on a daily basis by the priests on behalf of the nation. Twice a day lambs are offered as a burnt offering (see Leviticus 1): one in the morning and another in the evening. On holy days, extra sacrifices are added. These chapters explain just what is required on which day... To see how many sacrifices the priests would have to offer, one must add together all the offerings that are required for each reason. For example, on a Sabbath falling on the first day of a month, the priests would have to offer: two lambs (the daily offering) plus two lambs (the Sabbath offering) plus two bulls, one ram, seven lambs, and one goat (1st-day-of-the-month offering). Most of the sacrifices were burnt offerings (see Leviticus 1), but all the goats are sin offerings (see Leviticus 4). In addition to the animals being sacrificed, a grain offering of flour and oil, and a drink offering of wine had to be made. The size of the grain offering and drink offering varied with the animal being offered. Here the same quantities are prescribed as in Num. 15:4–10: a lamb must be accompanied by about half a gallon (1.9 liters) of flour, a quart (0.95 liters) of oil, and a quart (0.95 liters) of wine. At least double quantities are needed for a bull. These regulations make several points. First, they show the importance of the sacrificial system in Israel (cf. note on 15:1–16). In the limited time before his death, Moses explains what sacrifices must be offered in public worship on behalf of the whole nation. These are over and above the private sacrifices that a layperson may want to bring for personal reasons. Second, they are a strong assurance to Joshua that the nation will indeed inherit the land and become a prosperous agricultural community, able to provide for this lavish and expensive worship. It has been calculated that, over the course of a year, these sacrifices involved a total of 113 bulls, 1,086 lambs, over a ton of flour, and 1,000 bottles of oil and wine! Finally, this list of sacrifices underlines the importance of the sabbatical principle. Every seventh day is a Sabbath and marked by a doubling of the daily sacrifice, while the seventh month is marked by a huge number of extra sacrifices, especially during the Feast of Booths, which is clearly marked out as the biggest celebration of the year.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). [\*The ESV Study Bible\*](#) (pp. 310–311). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

**REQUIRED COMMUNAL OFFERINGS**

Occasion	BURNT OFFERINGS			SIN OFFERING
	Bulls	Rams	Lambs	
Daily (x 364)*			728	
Sabbath (x 52)			104	
New Moon (x 4)*	8	4	28	4
Unleavened Bread (x 7)	14	7	49	7
Pentecost	2	1	7	1
Trumpets	1	1	7	1
Atonement	1	1	7	1
Tabernacles	71	15	105	8
Annual Totals>>>	97	29	1035	22 <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., p. 465). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

### The Boundaries of the Promised Land

The original boundaries of the Promised Land as defined in Numbers 34 are somewhat different from the boundaries of the land that the Israelites eventually occupied. The original boundaries included the mountainous area north of Sidon and Damascus, but the Israelites never occupied this area during the settlement period. Conversely, the original boundaries did not include land east of the Jordan River, but the Israelites occupied this land after capturing it from Og and Sihon.<sup>41</sup>



<sup>41</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 320). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.