

Beloved Brothers, Sisters and friends

Bible Class 6th Oct 2022

## **The Number of Israel**

## **Numbers Chapter 1**

The Book of Numbers is the fourth Book of Five attributed to the pen of Moses.

The New King James version says, “ It takes its name from the two main numberings of the Israelites-the first at Mount Sinai and the second on the plains of Moab. Most of the Book however describes Israel’s experiences as they wander in the wilderness. The lesson of Numbers is clear. While it may be necessary to pass through wilderness experiences , one does not have to live there. For Israel an eleven day Journey became a forty- year agony.”

However we know that It is far more than this for we know **2 Ti 3:16**. *that All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

The Book opens with a census of the people by their tribes in the wilderness of Sinai and it was of twenty years old and upward of every man that was able to go to war and the number was six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. Those newly married were not required to go to war-Deut. 24v5.

In chapter 11 after just three days journey the people complained and it displeased The Lord. They had expressed the same complaints a year earlier just three days after deliverance through the waters of The Red Sea (Ex 15v22-27; then concerning the manna Ex 16 and lack of water Ex 17vs1-7). Because of this we see God’s anger manifest in **consuming** those in the outmost parts of the camp (is there significance in that it was the outer parts as we remember it was a “mixed multitude”?). But in fact it was the whole congregation that

complained to Moses, Num. 11 and this was too much for him and he complained to God. So quails in super abundance were sent. At this point God sent a “very great plague”. *And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.* So numbers would have been diminished significantly

In chapter 13 when they reach the Promised Land spies were sent out who on their return disheartened the people and they murmured against Moses and devised to return to Egypt. (Num 13:30 *And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it*).

At this point The Lord threatened **to destroy the whole congregation and to raise up seed unto Moses and make them a mightier** but Moses interceded and God listened to him. This was also a test of Moses’ faith because he knew the plan of God rested in the seed of Abraham.

Num.14 The people look back-The people of Israel had fled from Pharaoh who with his armies pursued after them and now in coming to the verge of the Promised Land the people lost faith with Moses and with God. The events and meaning of the Passover were lost on them-all their firstborn were saved whereas those of the Egyptians including animals had perished! Moses response had been Ex. 14:13 *And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever*

And now

Num 14:5-8 *Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.*

*If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.*

Nevertheless God assures whoever is faithful among them by referring to the offerings to be made when they do enter the Land. Nevertheless that generation were destined to die in the wilderness over a period of forty years.

In the rebellion of Korah and Dathan and Abiram and at least two hundred and fifty others, princes (ch16) could have resulted in the whole nation being destroyed apart from Moses and Aaron but for the intervention by Moses.

But the next morning the people gathered against Moses and Aaron and God threatened to destroy the whole congregation but Moses again intervened, but 14,700 died of a plague besides those who died in the matter of Korah.

The experiences of Israel as we go through the Book we find that although God's presence was clearly manifest it did not affect them deeply enough for them to put faith and trust in God. (*We have **a more sure word of prophesy** 2Peter 1:19 we are urged to give heed to this).*

In chapter 20 the people murmur again because they have no water. The people's language is again extreme. Moses was told to speak unto the rock and we see in v11 he was clearly exasperated with the people and in his anger struck the rock twice! But we are told that he did not believe God. Perhaps this was the result of losing his calm and focus. This resulted in his not crossing Jordan to go into the land but he was offered to view it.

Aaron also was not allowed to enter the land because he was complicit with Moses' lack of faith in an incident in the desert of Zin but he died without getting a view of the Land. The place was then called the waters of Meribah (strife). A powerful lesson here that whilst we have leaders, and there was none like Moses, we are responsible for our

own actions, or lack of them, and subsequently Moses went up Mt. Hor and God buried him there after viewing the Promised Land.

There was then the battle with Sihon and Og of the Amorites and Israel took it for a possession. We are not told of any fatalities of Israel in this battle. Miriam had died in Kadesh and was buried there just before this incident/event.

Then was the battle with the Canaanites which may have been without casualties on Israel's part. In spite of their victory the same old lack of faith showed through. The journey was harder because Edom would not let them pass through and they had to go around their land.

*Num 21:4-6 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Again we are not told the number of those who died.*

Very relevant passages written by Paul concerning these things:-

*Rom 9:22-29 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, **a remnant shall be saved:** For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a*

*short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.*

So it is plain that God is not interested in numbers for their own sake but in those who give their whole hearts to Him and endure to the end.

In chapter 22 the people set forward and pitch in the plains of Moab. They were afraid because **they were so many** and tried divination through Balaam. In his parable Balaam says *lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.*

Num. 23:10 *Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* And in chapter 24 he foretells Num 24:17 *I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

In the next chapter is recorded how Israel turn to idolatry and committed whoredom with the Midianites. A purge is needed, and Moses is commanded to tell the princes to slay everyone in his tribe who has joined to Baal-peor and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. But a plague from God had commenced and **twenty-four thousand died** And Phineas went into the tent and slew the woman and the man openly involved and God's anger was stayed. (We are shown here how important for those in Christ to choose a partner in the Lord).

A census is then called for and the figure came out at 607,300. This compares with the number that came out 603,550. This is all those men of twenty years and up able to go to war; no upper age limit is set. So whilst the overall number of Israel was diminished by less than four thousand in the end only two of those leaving Egypt entered the Promised Land

In chapter 26 we are told The Levites were not numbered as they were appointed over the ministry of the Tabernacle of Testimony and thus not eligible to go to war

Israel were to be a *“peculiar people unto God”* This was told them through Moses as intercessor:

*Exo 19:4-6: Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

Such were God's high hopes of the people he had called out of Egypt. But they were complainers. Ref Jude 1 and in reading this we remember that it was a “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt and Jude refers to some who had entered the flock unawares as “complainers”.

Complainers Mempsimoiros mem-psim'-oy-ros

From a presumed derivative of G3201 and μοῖρα moira (fate; akin to the base of G3313); blaming fate, that is, querulous (discontented): - complainer.

(Such then is the onus on interviewing brethren at Baptism, not only on doctrine but to see that people understand the onus of obedience to the Word. For a successful march through the wilderness God must be honoured in all we do and say and think).

We see in the meaning of this word “complainer” is a discontent; discontent with the circumstances that came upon them; blaming fate (God to the believer but fate to those weak in faith). But we read

*Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* Accepting this is a test and remembering that God is in control of all our circumstances; always to pray and not faint Luke 18:1.

So, far from being a book simply of numbers, it shows essential principles of faith and service that were taught to Israel during this time of probation.

Why did it all come about? Why when there were just eleven days journey to the Promised Land did they wander in the wilderness for forty years during which they all died but for Joshua and Caleb? It is shown us in Heb.3:12-16 and 4:11 that it was because of lack of faith, described as, “they erred in their heart”. We know that problem was with those chosen men who went to search the land even though they brought back evidence of its great fertility, their message was more strongly about the people of the land whom they must overcome

Love to all in Christ

Brother Ken

P.S.in the readings today (2Samuel 24) David calls for a census and the figure came out at 1.3million and his heart smote him that he had done this.

Today’s Jewish population in Israel is thought to be 6.5 million and that of the world 14.8.