

# Numbers

## Original Historical Setting

**Author:** Moses

**Date:** Written around 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

**Audience:** Israelites camped on the plains of Moab shortly before they crossed the Jordan River in to the Promised Land.

**Occasion:** The permanent historical record of the events of their national existence from the time of the covenant at Mt. Sinai to their position at the edge of the Promised Land.

**Timeline:** ~1445 B.C. – Ten Commandments given  
~1405 B.C. – Israel enters the Promised Land

## World Events that occur simultaneously

~1460 B.C. – Hittite empire begins

~1450 B.C. –Babylonian creation story Enuma Elish written

## Genre/Literary style

Narrative and laws (written in Hebrew prose) with some prophecies in Hebrew poetry

## Features and Structure

- Numbers has 2 major sections that each begin with a census (the first in **Ch 1-4** and the second in **Ch 26**)
- The chapters between the two censuses (**Ch 5-25**) record the complaining of the people and their lack of trust in God and the consequence—that of wandering in the desert for 40 years.
- After the 2nd census (**Ch 27-36**) underlying the narrative is the nagging question: “Will the second generation be successful, or will they repeat the errors of their fathers?”

## Key text(s)

13:1-33 – The sending in of the twelve spies

14:18 – The LORD visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation

20:11-12 – Why Moses could not enter the Promised Land

22:22-40 – A donkey speaks to Balaam

## What to look for

- Notice that the number of people in both censuses is about the same. Many feel this is a sign of the inability of man to prosper while doubting or distrusting God
- Compare Numbers 21 with John 3.
- Don’t get bogged down with the genealogies and numbers. However, realize the importance of these records for the Jews and their newly founded nation and promises of God to them.

## Interesting facts

- Tablets recently discovered in Palestine, and dating from this time period report that a fierce race of warriors called the “Ebrews” were moving into the Canaan area and all the surrounding cities were afraid of them because they were killing everything in their path.
- The Jews knew this book by the name, “In the Wilderness” for obvious reasons
- The Greek name (Numbers) refers to the censuses taken at the beginning and the end of the book.
- Although many people use two snakes on a pole (a caduceus) to represent the medical profession, it is more properly represented by one snake on a pole similar to the one Moses raised up (the Nehushtan) in Gen 21.
- In 1967 there was a discovery in Deir-Alla, Jordan of an inscription dating to about 700BC that refers to the Balaam of Numbers 22

## Memory Verse: Numbers 30:2