

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we will learn how the book of NUMBERS came into being, its character as a divine revelation, its division into three main parts and its teachings about serving and complaining.

POINT 1. THE ORIGIN OF NUMBERS

First. The name of the book.

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is called “in the desert”, referring to Israel’s journey in the desert between Mount Sinai and the border of Canaan. In the oldest translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, it is called “numbers”, referring to the census of Israel in the first four chapters of the book.

Second. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

From the book of Numbers itself we discover the following two facts:

One. Numbers was written by Moses.

From many places in the book of Numbers it is clear that Israel was *living in tents in a camp in the desert*. For example, in Numbers 1:52 we read that the Israelites had to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. The many references to the *Tent of Meeting*, which was a tent which could be moved from place to place, show that Israel was still living in the desert. In Numbers 33:3 we read, “The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly, in full view of the Egyptians.” As we have seen in the book of Exodus, this was on the 15th of April (H: Abib, first month) 1447 B.C. The book of Numbers begins with the words, “The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” This was the beginning of the month May 1446 B.C. From Numbers 12:16, 13:26 and 20:1,22 we understand that Israel journeyed from Sinai to Kadesh, and again from Kadesh around in the desert back to Kadesh, and then from Kadesh via Mount Hor to the border of Canaan opposite Jericho. Comparing Numbers 20:1,22 with Numbers 33:38 we read that Israel came to Mount Hor near the border of Edom during the fifth month of their fortieth year in the desert. Deuteronomy 2:14 says that Israel had wandered for 38 years around in the desert after they had refused to enter Canaan from the South until they arrived at the border of Canaan in the East. We therefore conclude that Moses recorded the book Numbers between the years 1446 B.C. and 1407 B.C. while Israel was wandering in the desert before they entered the land of Canaan. The book of Numbers gives a few more dates.

Numbers gives the date of the consecration of the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle), exactly one year after Israel’s departure from Egypt. Exodus 19:1-2 says that Israel arrived at Mount Sinai 3 months after they had departed from Egypt. Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai for a little more than ten and a half months. Numbers 7:1 speaks of the time when the Tent of Meeting was completed and consecrated. Exodus 40:17 says that this took place on the first day of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt – that is, in the beginning of April 1446 B.C. Numbers 9:15 says that on the day the Tent of Meeting was set up, the cloud of the Lord’s glory covered it.

Numbers gives the date of the celebration of the first Passover after Israel departed from Egypt. Numbers 9:1-5 says that after the Tent of Meeting was set up, the Lord commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover Festival in the desert of Sinai. This took place on the 14th day in the evening of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt - that is, in the middle of April 1446 B.C.

Numbers gives the date of the first census of Israel. Numbers 1:1 says that on the first day of the second month of the second year after the departure from Egypt, that was the beginning of May 1446 B.C., the Lord commanded Moses to take a census of Israel. Israel numbered more than 600 000 men over 20 years of age. This number did not include the women, children and the tribe of Levi.

Numbers also gives the date of Israel’s departure from Mount Sinai. Numbers 10:11 says that on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the departure from Egypt, that was twenty days after the census, the cloud of the Lord’s glory lifted from above the Tent of Meeting and Israel journeyed from the desert of Sinai to Kadesh in the desert of Paran.

Two. Numbers had a few later additions by an editor.

Just like the book of Leviticus, the book of Numbers shows that several adjustments to regulations were made after Israel had settled in Canaan. Numbers 8:23-26 says that the term of service of the Levites was to be from the age of 25

to 50 years. But according to Numbers 4:3 their term of service was to be from the age of 30 to 50 years. This means that the account of the census in its present form was probably written later.

Certain passages, which speak of the difference between *the alien* and *the native-born*, are probably from the time Israel already lived in Canaan and had absorbed many aliens into their community. For example, Numbers 9:14 says, "An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born."

No matter whom God used to write the book of Numbers, we Christians believe that the whole Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit. We base this on 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Third. The character of the book.

Many times in the book of Numbers we read: "The Lord said to Moses". Thus the book itself very clearly states that it is *a revelation* from the Lord. After the rebellion of the ten spies and Israel against going up into Canaan to conquer it from the South, the book of Numbers describes very little of the history of 38 years of wandering and living in the desert. During those 38 years, Numbers only relates the following events: the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the budding staff of Aaron and the sin of Moses beating the rock. This fact proves that the Old Testament does not intend to give *a history of Israel*, but is rather *a history of God's revelation*. The Old Testament is *a history of God's words and wonderful acts!* Periods in which nothing of importance happens for God's history of revelation are passed over with silence.

POINT 2. THE DIVISION OF NUMBERS

The book of Numbers may be divided into three main parts as follows:

The first part of Numbers consists of chapters 1:1 to 10:10.

It consists of *ritual laws* and has 2 sections. Following Exodus chapters 25 to 40 and Leviticus chapters 1 to 26, Numbers chapters 1-10 consists mainly of ceremonial (ritual) laws.

Section one. Numbers 1-4 consists of numbers.

Numbers 1 gives the result of the census of Israel, showing how God had fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, where God promised, "I will make you into a great nation." Numbers 2 describes the orderly way in which the tribes of Israel should camp and journey. The Tent of Meeting should be surrounded by the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Levi should be surrounded by the other 10 tribes and 2 half-tribes in order to show how holy and unapproachable the Lord is! Numbers 3 and 4 describe the assigned tasks of the three groups of Levites under the leadership of the priests.

Section two. Numbers 5-10 consists of laws.

Numbers 5 and 6 consists of several ceremonial (ritual) laws concerning ceremonial cleanliness. Numbers 7 to 10 consists of the dedication of the Tent of Meeting, the consecration of the Levites, the first Passover Festival in the desert, the cloud of the Lord's glory above the Tent of Meeting and the trumpets that should give signals to all the people.

The second part of Numbers consists of chapters 10:11 to 20:13.

It describes *Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh*, where they stayed and from where they journeyed around in the desert. It consists of 6 sections.

Section one. Numbers 10 describes Israel's departure from Mount Sinai and that a family member of the wife of Moses travelled along as a guide in the desert.

Section two. Numbers 11-14 describes five events that happened during their journey to Kadesh. One. The Israelites complained about their hardships and the Lord punished them with fire from heaven (11). Two. The Israelites complained about their food and the Lord punished them with a plague (11). Three. The sister and brother of Moses opposed his leadership and the Lord punished his sister with leprosy (12). Four. The Israelites rebelled against Moses and Aaron after ten of the twelve spies or explorers to the land of Canaan spread a bad report among the people, The Lord punished them with exclusion from the Promised Land (13-14). Five. The Israelites were disobedient to the Lord and made an attempt to enter Canaan from the South. The Lord punished them by allowing the Canaanite nations to defeat them (14).

Section three. Numbers 15 consists of several ceremonial (ritual) laws concerning offerings, the Sabbath and the tassels on clothes.

Section four. Numbers 16-17 describes the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the budding staff of Aaron.

Section five. Numbers 18-19 consists of laws that regulate the duties of the priests and Levites, their share of the offerings and the water that cleanses people who are regarded as *ceremonially unclean*.

Section six. Numbers 20 describes the death of Miriam, the sin of Moses when he struck the rock and how God punished him with exclusion from the Promised Land.

The third part of Numbers consists of chapters 20:14 to 36:13.

It describes *Israel's journey from Kadesh to the plains of Moab* by the Jordan across from Jericho. It consists of six sections.

Section one. Numbers 20:14 - 21:9 describes the events during Israel's journey to the southern border of Edom. During this journey, Edom denies Israel passage through their country, Aaron dies on Mount Hor, a Canaanite king attacks Israel and Israel once more complains about their hardships. God punishes Israel with snake bites, but saves those who trust in him.

Section two. Numbers 21:10 - 22:1 describes the events during Israel's journey to the plains of Moab. During this journey, Israel defeats the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og.

Section three. Numbers 22 - 25 describes the attempts of the Moabites to conquer the Israelites. The Moabites fail to conquer the Israelites by cursing them. However, they succeed to seduce the Israelites to idolatry by sexual immorality. The Lord punishes Israel with a plague.

Section four. Numbers 26 to 27 describes the results of the second census of Israel. During their 40 years in the desert, Israel did not increase. The future partition of the land of Canaan should be based on this census. It is also decided under what circumstances daughters could inherit land. Joshua is commissioned to succeed Moses.

Section five. Numbers 28 to 30 teaches regulations concerning offerings, the seasonal festivals and vows.

Section six. Numbers 31 to 36 describes the events in the region East of the Jordan. The Midianites are totally destroyed and their spoils are divided. Two and a half of the tribes of Israel settle in this region. The stages of Israel's journey during these 40 years are listed. The Lord commands Israel to drive the idolatrous Canaanite nations out of Canaan. The boundaries of Canaan are delineated. The cities that should be given to the Levites, the cities of refuge and the inheritance of certain women is regulated.

POINT 3. THE TEACHINGS ABOUT SERVING AND COMPLAINING

First. The book of Numbers is a book of service.

Throughout the book of Numbers we find the instructions God gives to all the people or to certain people with respect to specific tasks they have to do. *The New Testament shows that certain Old Testament principles continue to exist in the New Testament teachings and practices.* In the book of Numbers we find the following kinds of services.

In *Numbers 1*, all the men who are twenty years and older should pay the tax for the upkeep of the offerings that are made in the Tent of Meeting. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should contribute to the upkeep of the Lord's work in the Church, in missions and in the work of mercy in the world.

In *Numbers 2*, all the tribes, clans and families should maintain the orderly camp in which they live. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should maintain order in their own families, in their church services and in the society in which they live.

In *Numbers 3-4*, the priests and the Levites are responsible for maintaining the service of the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. Likewise, in the New Testament, God has appointed certain people to be missionaries, evangelists, pastors and teachers to build up the Church everywhere in the world.

In *Numbers 5*, all the Israelites must exclude every form of defilement from their midst. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians must not only avoid every form of sexual immorality and idolatry, but must also exclude every form of sin from the Church.

In *Numbers 6*, the priests had to bless the people of Israel. The priestly blessing is, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians must not only bless their brothers and sisters, but even their enemies!

In *Numbers 8*, the Levites must be dedicated to the service of the Lord between the ages of 25 and 50 years. After that, they must retire and hand over the work to the younger priests, although they may still assist in the work of the Lord.

Likewise, in the New Testament, the older Christians must not despise the contribution of the younger Christians. In 1 Timothy 4:12-16 we read, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.”

In *Numbers 9*, every Israelite must observe the Passover festival. The Passover Festival points backwards to the salvation of God from the slavery to sin and idols in Egypt and it points forward to the coming Lamb of God, who would die on the cross and shed his blood for the sins of his people. Every single Israelite had to remember that the centre of his life should be the God of the Bible who saves his people through the blood of the Lamb! Likewise, in the New Testament, every Christian should set his heart and mind on Jesus Christ and the things of Christ (Col 3:1-3).

In *Numbers 10*, the Israelites had to respond to the various trumpet signals. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should not only obey God’s Word, but should also sound clear trumpet calls when they preach and teach the truths of God’s Word (1 Cor 14:8).

Second. The book of Numbers is a book of complaints.

Throughout Israel’s wanderings in the desert, the children of Israel showed a *spirit of rebellion* against God. They were continually dissatisfied with God’s sovereign decisions and ways in which he dealt with them. The clearest way you can see that somebody rebels against the sovereign decisions of God, is when they continually complain against God for bringing them into their present situations or for allowing them to suffer difficulties. Grumbling and complaining is a *manifestation of unbelief*. In Numbers 14:11 God himself says, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?” The book of Numbers records the grumbings and complaints of the Israelites against God and against the leaders whom God appointed. It also records God’s punishments for their unbelief and disobedience.

In the book of Numbers we read about the following complaints of Israel. In *Numbers 11:1-3* they complained about their hardships in the desert. In *Numbers 11:4-35* they complained about eating the same food every day. In *Numbers 12* the family members of Moses complained about the leadership of Moses. In *Numbers 13 and 14* the Israelites complained about conquering the Promised Land. In *Numbers 14:39-45* they complained against the righteous verdict God had pronounced on them. In *Numbers 16 and 17* some of the leaders and people complained against God’s appointment of certain people to be the leaders of certain tasks. In *Numbers 20 and 21* they again complained about the hardships through which God was leading them in the desert.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week read Deuteronomy 1-8. After 2 weeks we will introduce the book of Deuteronomy.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.