

Numbers: In the Wilderness

May 9, 2021

Title and Purpose

“Numbers” is the English translation of the Greek title of the book which is derived from the pronounced focus on specific numbers in the text. The Hebrew title (*bemidbar*) translates “in the wilderness” and is arguably the more appropriate summary of the content as we follow the Israelites during their journey from Mt. Sinai to the plains of Moab overlooking the Promised Land. Throughout the text we see Israel’s persistent rebellion against God as well as His just and righteous responses. These collective narratives serve to illustrate that God is both just and merciful, and both sovereign and personal.

Structure

- a. Law-giving and the census at Mt. Sinai (1:1 – 10:10)
- b. Journey from Sinai to Kadesh (10:11 – 12:16)
- c. Law-giving at Kadesh (13:1 – 19:22)
- d. Journey from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (20:1 – 22:1)
- e. Law-giving on the Plains of Moab (22:2 – 36:13)

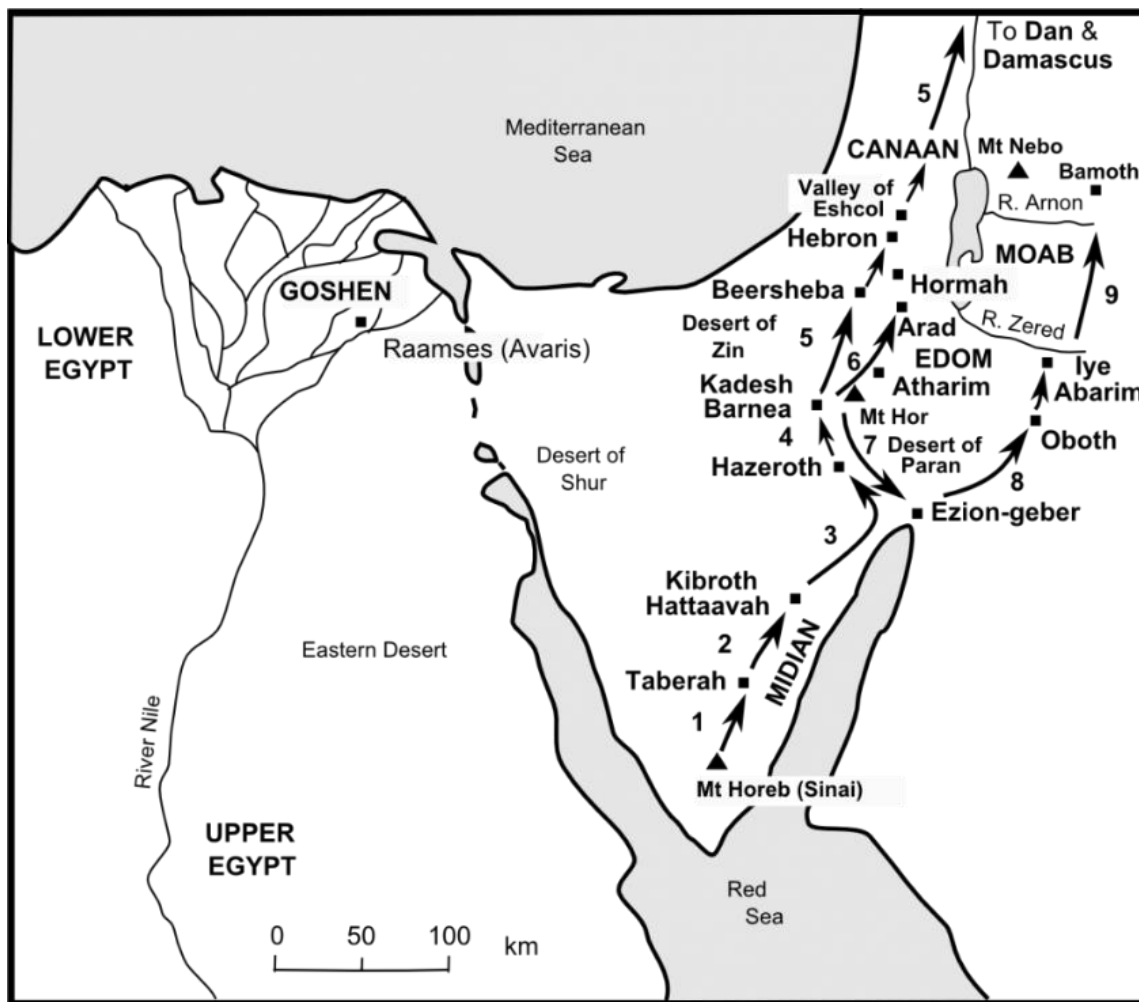


Image accessed online at <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/26-the-journey-continues-from-sinai-to-moab/hardships-encountered-in-the-desert/>

Summary of rebellions and complaints in the book of Numbers

Journey	Complaint / Event	Consequence	Resolution	Reference
Toward Kadesh	Unspecified grumbling	Consuming fire	Moses prays, and God relents	11:1 – 3
Toward Kadesh	No meat / selfish greed	Plague after Israel hoards meat graciously provided by God	Nation cleansed of sinful offenders, rest of nation spared	11:4 – 35
Toward Kadesh	Moses' unique authority	Miriam stricken with leprosy	Restoration after 7 days of exile	12:1 – 16
In Kadesh	Spies' negative report / inability to conquer Canaan	Entire nation to wander wilderness for 40 years, current generation to die without entering Canaan	Moses prays, and nation is pardoned. Successful conquest promised to next generation.	13:1 – 14:45
In Kadesh	Korah's rebellion / Moses' authority	Earth swallows up camps of rebel leaders, fire consumes 250 that offered prideful offerings	Nation cleansed of sinful offenders, rest of nation spared	16:1 – 40
In Kadesh	Unfair punishment for Korah	Plague over entire camp, death of 14,700	Aaron runs through camp with burning incense as urgent atonement measure, God relents	16:41 – 50
Toward Moab	No water at Meribah / Moses strikes the rock	Moses sentenced to die in wilderness, cannot enter Canaan	Through waters, God "show[s] himself holy." Moses still permitted to see the Promised Land before he dies (Deut. 34)	20:2 – 13
Toward Moab	No food or water	Fiery snakes bite and kill the nation	Nation repents, bronze serpent offered as God's object of gracious salvation from effects of bites	21:4 – 9
In Moab	Balaam's donkey (not Israelite complaint)	God permits donkey to audibly speak to Balaam	Balaam convinced to obey God, blesses rather than curses Israel	22:22 – 24:19
In Moab	Apostasy at Peor	Nation suffers plague killing 24,000, offending Israelite chiefs executed	Phineas executes specific offender, God relents and spares nation	25:1 – 18

Themes

1. Sin and its _____
 - a. God is _____ to punish sin.

 - b. God is _____ and desires to forgive sin and relent from His wrath.

2. God's _____ and His covenantal _____
 - a. God is _____ which means our sin cannot thwart His plans.

 - b. God is _____ which means His plans graciously include _____

to our _____.

