

Regarding the History of Redemption, Numbers records 38 years of frustrated wanderings in the wilderness. The reason for this--the hardness of the people's hearts--is a theme of Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3-4 where Israel's failure to enter the land is used as a warning against such hardness and the land of Canaan is held up as a type of the sabbath-rest of God. After the wonder of Sinai the predominant emotion must have been one of failure, and the vignettes of Numbers show the failure of every part of Israel's society to live up to the requirements of the Lord's holiness as listed in Leviticus. Having been given the standard, Israel needs to recognize her inability and turn to the one who alone is able. Redemption is not self-accomplished. It requires the power of one skilled and able to redeem and the readiness of the object to be redeemed (the availability, probably a better word.)

Among questions that arise in the study of Numbers are these: Are the numbers in the book accurate? How many people were in the nation of Israel during the wanderings in the desert? Why did God command the extermination of the Canaanites--including their children (Num. 33:51-56)? What was the role of Balaam? Was he a believer in the true God? If not how did he communicate with him so freely? If he was, how do we explain the condemnations in the New Testament?

Archaeology is not prominent in the study of Numbers although wall reliefs of Rameses II portray the Moabite frontier as a string of border forts at the time of Numbers. The narrative sections of Numbers also fit the general climate and topography of the Sinai peninsula and show the author's firsthand experiences of the events he describes.

Among the key passages is that of 33:1 where a capsule summary of the whole book is presented. A key theme to notice in Numbers is that of failure: Miriam and Aaron (12) the people (14), the priesthood through Korah (16), and even Moses himself (20). The prophecies of Balaam are also important in light of Israel's later history and the coming of Christ.

To study Numbers better, read through the book seeking to grasp the interplay of its historical and legal sections, diagrams of the camping and marching arrangements of Israel, etc. Try to see the practicality of the book in the life of the people as it portrays it for our learning.

Further Reading may include the chapter in the New Bible Commentary (the original was by A.A.MacRae, the revised has another author), and the work in DeGraaf: Promise and Deliverance, Vol. I. The Wilderness Journeys by Leon Wood (Baptist Press) constitutes a nice Bible study guide to Numbers...but is mostly in the devotional area

## 2. A Brief Analytical Outline of Numbers

- I. Preparation for departure from Sinai 1:1 --10:10
  - A. The people numbered 1
  - B. The organization of the camp 2-4
  - C. Law of cleanliness for the camp 5
  - D. Law of the Nazarite 6
  - E. Last events at Sinai 7-9
    1. ceremonial enactments 7-8
    2. the Passover 9:1-14
    3. Movement 9:15-23