

# HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

A course in Biblical literacy

## How to read... NUMBERS

Graham McGeown

### 1. The Outline and Structure of Numbers

- Continues on from Leviticus
- Largely organised in terms of "place": what happened where.
- 1:1 - 10:10; last 3 weeks at Sinai
- 10:10 – 12:16; journey to the borders of Canaan (a few weeks)
- Ch 13 & 14: exploration of Canaan (40 days) and rebellion
- Ch 15 – 21: a generation of wilderness wanderers (almost 40 years)
- Ch 21 – 36: back to Moab: living on the edge of the promise

### 2. Some prominent themes:

- Military and legal organisation: Ch 1-4 (Counting the people: 2 main censuses: Ch 1 and Ch 26); Ch 5; Ch 26; Ch 27: 1-11; Ch 32; Ch 34-36
- Religious practices and festivals: Ch 5-10; Ch 15; Ch 18 & 19; Ch 28-30
- Grumbling and opposition to God and Moses' leadership: 11: 1-3; 4-6; 12: 1-15; Ch 13 & 14; Ch 16 & 17; 20:1-13; 21:4-9; Ch 25
- Balak and Balaam (Ch 22-24; further note in 31:16)
- Handover of leadership (Joshua to succeed Moses, 27: 18-21; Eleazar succeeds Aaron, 20: 27-29)

### 3. Summary

- Fear and anger defines the future for a wasted generation
- God may adapt His plan to current realities but the ultimate goal remains unchanged
- God intends His people to be distinct from the society around them

#### Helpful resources:

- The Bible Project Numbers overview from YouTube:  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp5MlrMZFqo>)
- *Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone* by John Goldingay (part of the Old Testament for Everyone series)

## For Discussion:

### A Ch 13-10: Operation "Canaan Overview"

1. What did Moses want the spies to find out about Canaan? (13: 17-20)
2. What was the main "mood music" in their report? (13: 31-33)
3. What emotions did this provoke in the community as a whole? (14: 1-4; v10)

### B. Ch 14: 11-45 Forgiveness can still have consequences

1. What was God's initial response to all this? (14: 11-12)
2. What was the main theme of Moses' argument with God? (14: 13-19)
3. What was God's response? Does God change his mind? (14:20-23)
4. What consequences were there? (14: 29-30; 36-37)

### C. Ch 31: 1-24 Vengeance on the Midianites

*Note: Refers back to Ch 25 where Israelites in Moab, near the borders of Canaan, were drawn into worship of Baal through sexual immorality with foreign women, both Moabites and Midianites (25: 16-18). Not clear why Midian got most of the blame but Ch 22 suggests that the Moabites were allied with or subservient to a larger Midianite clan group (22: 4; "The Moabites said to the elders of Midian...")*

1. What is your immediate reaction to the statement "The Lord said to Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites"? (31: 1-2)
2. What difference might there have been in the motives of the soldiers and their leaders and those of Moses? (31: 13-18)
3. Do verses 19-24 cast any light on all of this at all?
4. Why might this be particularly important for a Jewish reader during the exile, say?
5. What relevance do passages like this have for Christians today?

Don't forget about this month's reading plan. If you haven't been following so far (or have given up), why not make this your new Year's resolution?

#### **NUMBERS // Graham McGeown 13<sup>th</sup> Jan**

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**DON'T MISS...** *How to read DEUTERONOMY with Kim Walsh*

**SUN 17<sup>th</sup> February**