

The Literary Structure of the Book of Numbers

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Chiastic Structure of Numbers 1 – 36

1. God numbers Israel for the camp and Tabernacle (Num.1 – 10); first generation
2. Plague breaks out due to complaining about not having meat (Num.11)
3. God defends Moses' leadership (Num.12)
4. Spies see the land of Canaan but people grumble; only two have faith; Moses intercedes for Israel; Temple sacrifices and teaching are given, presumably as part of God's response of cleansing Israel (Num.13 – 15)
5. Korah leads rebellion against Moses; God punishes it; reaffirms Aaron (Num.16 – 17)
 6. Aaron's sons must 'bear the guilt' for the sanctuary (Num.18)
 - 6'. Red heifer ashes and water to cleanse the people; sanctuary not enough (Num.19)
- 5'. Miriam dies; Moses rebels against God; God punishes Moses (Moses not enough); Aaron dies (Num.20); this reflects a shift from the persons to the institution of the priesthood, to mediate
- 4'. Israel defeats Canaanites; people complain; serpents strike Israel; Moses lifts bronze serpent on a pole to enact God's healing; Israel starts to possess land (Num.21)
- 3'. God defends Israel from Balaam's curse; hope for Messiah (Num.22 – 24)
- 2'. Plague breaks out due to worshiping Baal of Peor (Num.25)
- 1'. God numbers Israel for inheriting the land and cities of Canaan (Num.26 – 36); second generation

Comparison of Exodus 1 – 18 and Numbers 1 – 36:

Exodus 1 – 18	Numbers 1 – 36
Pharaoh counts Israel and forces them to build cities (Ex.1)	God counts Israel for them to inherit land and cities (Num.1 – 3, 26 – 36)
God appears in a burning bush to Moses (Ex.2)	God appears in the Tabernacle to Israel (Num.4 – 10)
Moses questions his own leadership (Ex.3 – 4)	Others question Moses' leadership (Num.12, 16 – 17)
Pharaoh curses Israel (Ex.5 – 14)	Balaam blesses Israel (Num.22 – 24)
Plagues strike Egypt because of sin (Ex.7 – 14)	Plagues strike Israel because of sin (Num.11, 21, 25)
Miriam leads the congregation in worship (Ex.15)	Miriam sins, becomes leprous, and later dies (Num.12, 20)
Moses calls forth water from a rock (Ex.16)	Moses calls forth water from a rock, sins (Num.20)
God gives manna and quail to Israel (Ex.16)	God gives manna and quail to Israel – curse (Num.11)
Israel defeats Amalekites (Ex.17)	Israel defeats Canaanites, but complain and are struck by serpents and offered healing (Num.21)
Moses is the mediator between God and Israel	The priesthood of Aaron will be the mediators between God and Israel, in the sanctuary (Num.16 – 20)

Numbers by chapter

1 – 3: Count of the tribes

4 – 10: Preparation of the Tabernacle

11: people complain about not having meat; God gives them 1 month of meat; gives the Spirit to 70 elders; plague breaks out due to quail

12: Miriam and Aaron question Moses' leadership; God calls them together at the Tent and Miriam becomes leprous; Moses prays for her

13: Twelve spies see the land; ten fear and lie; Caleb and Joshua alone have faith

14: Moses intercedes for Israel; quotes the confession about the Lord being slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness'; God says that everyone but them will die in the wilderness; the ten men die; Israel tries to go into the land but fails

15: Temple sacrifices for unintentional and intentional sins; the Lord commands Israel to stone a man who gathered wood on the Sabbath; institutes blue tassels as a reminder of the commandments

16: Korah leads a rebellion against Moses; Moses intercedes for the sons of Levi; God opens the earth to swallow only Korah, Abiram, and Dathan; but fire consumed 250 who were offering incense; the people complain but Moses and Aaron intercede and hold back the plague, which kills 14,700.

17: Out of all twelve rods, only Aaron's rod budded; sign of God's choice of Aaron

18: When the people say in fear that they will die in the Lord's presence, Moses says to Aaron that his sons and descendants will 'bear the guilt' for the sanctuary and be a special priesthood; they must enlist the other Levites; they will eat from the Temple sacrifices of the firstfruits that the Israelites tithe;

19: The red heifer sacrifice makes a mixture of ash and water that will purify from uncleanness; death causes uncleanness

20: Miriam dies; the people complain about water again; Moses and Aaron strike the rock and God says they are disobedient; Edom refuses to help; Aaron dies

21: Israel defeats Canaanites; the people complain; God sends serpents and Moses lifts the bronze serpent; Israel defeats Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan

22: Moab fears Israel; Balak son of Zippor king of Moab sent messengers to Balaam; Balaam first refuses to curse Israel but then comes to Balak on a donkey; God speaks through the donkey to Balaam

23 – 24: Balaam blesses Israel, Balak gets angry

25: Israel worships Baal of Peor with Moab; a plague breaks out; Phinehas slays a man and a Midianite woman to stop the plague;

26: God tells Moses to take a census of Israel

27: Zelophahad's daughters ask the question about land inheritance; God tells Moses he will die and Moses asks God to anoint Joshua

28: Sacrifices for feasts, Passover, unleavened bread (for seven days), first fruits

29: Sacrifices for the seventh month: first day, tenth day, fifteenth day (for seven days),

30: Vows, household vows involving wives and daughters,

31: Israel wars on Midian, kills kings and Balaam, spoils of war

32: The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh claim their possession as west of the Jordan River but agree to accompany Israel to take the land

33: Summary of Israel's exodus and wilderness wandering

34: Instructions for dividing up the land

35: Instructions for giving the Levites the cities, and cities of refuge to alleviate the pollution of the land by blood

36: Instructions for inheritance of land in the case of Zelophahad's daughters