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The Book of  
**NUMBERS**

*by*

**TIMOTHY R. ASHLEY**

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*To  
David H. Wallace  
and  
the Memory of  
Robert B. Laurin (1927–77)  
Christian Gentlemen  
and Scholars, Both*

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## PREFACE

The book of Numbers will never replace the Psalms at the heart of Christian devotion nor the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Romans at the heart of Christian theology, nor should it. The book of Numbers is a story. The story has two main characters, God and Israel. The way the story is told sounds odd and often times harsh to modern ears. For example, I suspect that the opening four chapters with all their names and numbers have defeated many folk who have decided to read through the whole Bible and have just emerged from the rigours of Leviticus. I suspect, as well, that the brutal nature of such passages as the end of the Korah story (ch. 16), the story of Phinehas (ch. 25), and the war with Midian (ch. 31) are repellent to many.

In spite of all these difficulties, and others, that confront modern readers, the point of the book of Numbers is important for God's people in any age: Exact obedience to God is crucial. Numbers makes the point most especially through examples of *disobedience* such as those found in chs. 11–21. Although it is clear that God punishes disobedience, at the heart of the book of Numbers is the God who, while demanding exact obedience, is constantly revealing ways in which Israel can render obedience through new torah (i.e., teaching; see chs. 5–9, 15, 17, 27–30, 32–36). It is notable that the invitations to new obedience come right in the midst of Israel's failure and rebellion. Israel though the story of its disobedience and failure was important enough to tell, claiming the Bible (including Numbers) as our standard of faithful conduct, Christians have implicitly said that the story of Numbers is *re-telling*. It is important that God's people re-learn the fact that rebellion will still lead to "death in the wilderness." Numbers is the story of a people who did what they ought to have known better than doing, and suffered for it (see also Paul's lament in Rom. 7:15). The failure of our generation may be salutary for us all.

The book of Numbers has been my companion now for the better part of a decade. It has been a comfort, a judgment, a joy, and a frustration all at the same time. Through the years many resources have come to my desk. Never far away has been George Buchanan Gray's great commentary. Although it is now nearly 70 years old and, in many respects out-of-date, Gray's grasp of Hebrew philology is indispensable. He is "the" commentator on Numbers with whom one agrees or disagrees. To have done a considerable amount of the latter, it is no sign of disrespect. Quite the contrary, it is a mark of Gray's erudition that long after his death his work should still be used. The commentary by Philip Budd in the *New Biblical Commentary* has also been indispensable because of its discussions of the (supposed) redactional history of the various sections of the book. These discussions really form a summary of most critical work on the book from the middle of the last century to the early 1980s. The reader of the present work will note how little these redactional histories are discussed here. The reason is not that such matters are unimportant, but that I am quite sure that no one knows these things nor really can know them. I am, therefore, committed to explaining the final form of the text as the primary job of a commentary for the Church. No one knows better than I do now how difficult it is to explain the text. The reader is directed to Budd if she/he wishes to read on these critical matters as a primary concern. The many articles and, in the last stages of this work, the commentary by Jacob Milgrom have also been of assistance to me on many matters of research on the sacrificial system and much more.

The manuscript of this commentary was submitted to publishers in August 1990. During a delay in publication due to editorial changes at least three major commentaries on Numbers have appeared: Milgrom's (in the *Jewish Publication Society Torah* [1990]), F. F. Harrison's (in the *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* [1990]), and I. Allen's (in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 [also 1990]). I have only been able to use these works in the proof-reading stage, and, so, in a less thorough way than they deserve. In the case of Milgrom, this problem is partially offset by the many articles of his that have been available.

Only those who have tried to write commentaries know the difficulties involved. Commentaries are never wholly satisfactory (this one is certainly no different). I would thank my colleagues and students at Acadia Divinity College and Acadia University for their understanding. Craig and Jacqueline Hiebert deserve thanks for compiling the indexes. Special thanks goes to the Principal of the Divinity College, the Rev. Dr. Andrew D. MacRae, for his willingness to release me

some teaching and administrative duties in the interests of research writing. Last of all, I thank my wife and colleague in ministry, the Maxine F. Ashley, for encouragement in untold ways while enduring long hours of my preoccupation with the book of Numbers. These tribulations and many others make her help the most precious of all.

It is hoped, however, that, with its weaknesses, the comment will be of some use to those who wish better to hear and re-tell the of exact obedience in the book of Numbers.

TIMOTHY R. ASH  
*Wolfville, Nova Scotia*  
*August*

## ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AJT	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
Akk.	Akkadian
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
Assyr.	Assyrian
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ATDA	J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., <i>Aramaic Texts from the Desert of Arabia</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1976
AusBR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906
BHK	R. Kittel, et al., eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> . Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937
BHS	K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967–77
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies

<i>BK</i>	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BWANT</i>	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testam.
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihefte zur <i>ZAW</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DJD</i>	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DOTT</i>	D. Winton Thomas, ed., <i>Documents from Old Testament Times</i> . Repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1961
<i>EBC</i>	Expositor's Bible Commentary
Eng.	English
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FOTL</i>	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Genesis' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Ed. E. Kautzsch. Tr. A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
<i>GNB</i>	Good News Bible (Today's English Version)
<i>HALAT</i>	W. Baumgartner, et al., <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>HDB</i>	<i>Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Heb.	Hebrew
<i>HKAT</i>	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IB</i>	G. A. Buttrick, et al., eds., <i>Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1953–56
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB(Sup)</i>	G. A. Buttrick, et al., eds., <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962. <i>Supplemental Volume</i> . Ed. K. Crim, et al. 1976
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	J. Orr, et al., eds., <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . 2nd ed. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939. Rev. ed. G. W. Bromiley, et al. 4 vols. 1979–88
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JB</i>	Jerusalem Bible

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JPST</i>	The JPS Torah Commentary
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>JSOT Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KB</i>	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1958
<i>LS</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, Scott, Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>Mish.</i>	Mishnah
<i>Moffatt</i>	James Moffatt, <i>The Moffatt Bible</i>
<i>ms(s).</i>	manuscript(s)
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NBD</i>	J. D. Douglas, et al., eds., <i>New Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NEB</i>	New English Bible
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown, et al., eds. <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NJPS</i>	New Jewish Publication Society Version
<i>NKJV</i>	New King James Version
<i>OBT</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PEFQS</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>Pesh.</i>	Peshitta
<i>PJ</i>	<i>Palästina-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>Proceedings, 1989</i>	J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds. <i>The Balaam Texts Deir 'Alla . . .</i> Leiden: Brill, 1990
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>

RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
Sam. Pent.	Samaritan Pentateuch
SB	Sources bibliques
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBOT	Sacred Books of the Old Testament
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SEÅ	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Study Monograph Series
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series
Syr.	Syriac
Targ(s).	Targum(s)
T.B.	Babylonian Talmud
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Tr. and ed. G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76
<i>TDOT</i>	G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Tr. D. Green, et al. Vols. 1–11 (in date). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–90
<i>TGUOS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society</i>
<i>THAT</i>	E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1971–76
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TPQ</i>	<i>Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	R. Harris, et al., eds., <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . 2 vols. Chicago: Moody, 1980
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
Ugar.	Ugaritic
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>VT</i>

Vulg.	Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEC	The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	M. Tenney, et al., eds., <i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> . 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–76
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

# INTRODUCTION

## I. TITLE AND CONTENTS

The title of the book in English comes through the Vulgate from the Latin which used the title “Numbers” (Vulg. *Numeri*; LXX *Arithmoi*). The ancient Hebrew titles come from the first word of the text (*way<sup>e</sup>dabbēr*, “he spoke”) or, more commonly, the fourth (*b<sup>e</sup>midbar*, “in the wilderness [of]”).<sup>1</sup> “In the wilderness” describes the contents of the book much better than “numbers,” which is derived from the census takings of chs. 1–4.

The story is rather simple. Israel is counted by Moses, Aaron, and the leaders in order to prepare for the march to Canaan and life in the land following the conquest (chs. 1–4). After further exhortations to holy living and preparations to depart from Mt. Sinai (5:1–10:10), Israel leaves the holy mountain for Canaan (10:11–12:13). Spies are sent out from the mountain of Kadesh-barnea to reconnoiter. When they return to Moses and the people, their report is split. The majority say that the land and its inhabitants are too mighty to be taken. The minority (Caleb and Joshua) say that, because God had promised victory, he would bring victory for Israel, despite the strength of the land and its people. The people of Israel choose to believe the majority and are ready to go back to Egypt (thus rebelling against the leadership of Yahweh as well as that of Moses and Aaron) when God intervenes and punishes their disbelief and disobedience. Because of their sin, every person over the age of twenty would wander and die in the wilderness without coming into possession of Canaan. They would wander for forty years, until the whole generation was dead (chs. 13–14).

The Israelites decide to try to make things better on their own. Unassisted by God (or Moses), they try to conquer the land but

1. Counting *’el-mōšeh* (“to Moses”) as one word, since they are joined by a maqqeph, which deprives the first word of its independent accent.

humiliated in defeat (14:40–45). So for nearly forty years the people wander around Kadesh-barnea in the wilderness until all that generation dies (chs. 16–19). They then return to Kadesh-barnea, and are told to go out once again for Canaan. They depart from Kadesh-barnea and travel to the plains of Moab, just outside the land of promise (chs. 20–21). Along the way, they win some battles, showing that the tide is turning (21:21–35). Just outside Canaan, the people are blessed by Balaam, a foreign seer (chs. 22–24). After his blessing, they sin further at Peor and are punished again (ch. 25). On the plains of Moab a new census is taken to mark the new beginning (ch. 26). The people wait for further instruction for life in the land of Canaan, where Joshua will lead them after the death of Moses (chs. 27–36).

## II. STRUCTURE

One may analyze the structure of any book in several ways. The kind of structure one sees depends on the questions one asks. Most commentators have structured Numbers in three sections related to geographic location: section I at Mt. Sinai (1:1–10:10); section II at and around Kadesh-barnea (10:11–19:22), and section III on the plains of Moab (20:1–36:13). Another kind of structure involves two travel sections: the first from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea (10:11–12:13), and the second from Kadesh-barnea to the plains of Moab (20:1–21:35). The venue of section I is the same as for Exod. 20–Lev. 27 and hence links Numbers with the central books of the Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup>

D. T. Olson has proposed an alternate structure that divides the book into two sections of unequal length: section I: The Death of the Old Generation; the first Exodus generation fails in the wilderness (chs. 1–25:19); and section II: The Birth of the New; the second Exodus generation prepares to take the land of Canaan (26:1–36:13). This view sees the two census documents (chs. 1 and 26) as forming the pillars of the book's structure, and the theme of the book as two-generational: the failure of one generation and the promise of another.<sup>2</sup> Section I is broken down into a cycle of preparation for departure and inauguration of it (1:1–10:10).

1. For discussion and criticism of this structure for Numbers see D. T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, BJS 71 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 31–37.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–124.

and a cycle of rebellion, death, and deliverance, ending in ultimate faithfulness (11:1–25:19). Section II is broken down into a large and disparate group of passages dealing with preparation and organization of the second generation of the Exodus generation as it prepares to enter the land of Canaan (26:1–36:13). The fate of that second generation is left open at the end of the book, but is a matter of conjecture — perhaps a promise of great success, perhaps a warning of great danger.<sup>3</sup>

Although Olson’s analysis has much to recommend it, the traditional analysis of Numbers connects the book more closely with the Pentateuch, in which it is, after all, set. With most commentators on the book, I follow such an analysis here.

### III. AUTHORSHIP AND COMPOSITION

The book of Numbers does not name its author. In 33:2 Moses is said to have written down the “starting points” of the Hebrews’ journey, “by stage,” which probably indicates at least the framework for the itinerary of ch. 33, but, as is well known, this is the only reference to Moses’ writing in the book. One cannot discuss the question of authorship and composition of Numbers in isolation from that of the other books of the Pentateuch. The history of pentateuchal criticism is too lengthy to rehearse here, but some brief words of representative positions on the matter are in order.

Scholars who believe that Moses had a significant role to play in the composition of the Pentateuch appeal to the following evidence. First, the text itself claims that Moses wrote some of the material of the Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup> Second, the Pentateuch refers hundreds of times to Moses receiving communications from Yahweh.<sup>2</sup> Third, much of the material of the book of Numbers makes good sense in the Mosaic age, indeed, better sense than in the postexilic age (see further below).<sup>3</sup> Those who espouse this view usually maintain the theological presupposition that the Bible

3. *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 123–24.

1. In addition to Num. 33:2, see Exod. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Deut. 31:1.

2. E.g., see the clause “Yahweh said/spoke to Moses (and Aaron),” which occurs over 60 times in the book of Numbers alone (1:1; 2:1; 3:1, 5, 11, 12, 14, 17, 21; 5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 7:4; 8:1, 5, 23; 9:1, 9; 10:1; 11:16, 23; 13:1; 14:11, 20, 26; 15:1, 17, 37; 16:20; 17:1, 9, 16 [Eng. 16:36, 44; 17:1]; 18:8, 25; 19:1; 20:7, 12, 23; 21:8, 34; 25:4, 10, 16, 19; 26:52; 27:6, 12, 18; 28:1, 25; 34:1, 16; 35:1, 9). The same clause occurs in Exodus 63 times.

3. See the discussion in R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 614–22.

authoritative. Hence, when the text claims that, for example, Moses wrote something or received a communication from God, it is not just a literary convention but a description of historical fact.

The position that most commonly stands over against the so-called traditional theory of Mosaic authorship is associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen, who, in his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, defended and refined the view that the Pentateuch was made up of a series of written documents: J (Jahwist or Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), P (Priestly), originating from the early monarchy to the postexilic period (P).<sup>4</sup> The editing of the whole of the Pentateuch occurred at the hands of a Priestly redactor (not necessarily the same as the Priestly author as the P source) in the postexilic age (perhaps 5th century B.C.).

The criteria scholars used to divide the sources were, first, the alternation between the divine names (Yahweh and Elohim especially); second, different names for the same reality (such as Horeb/Sinai); third, double or triple narratives of the same event (e.g., passing off one's sister as one's sister; Gen. 12:10–13:1; 20:1–18; 26:6–11); and, fourth, vocabulary that occurs only in one document or another (e.g., the word *kind*, *mîn*, said to occur only in P).<sup>5</sup> These scholars assumed that all institutions, writings, and other manifestations of human civilization moved along a unilinear evolutionary scale from simple to complex. For example, if an institution was simple, free, and anthropomorphic, it must be early; if it was complex, institutional, liturgical, and less anthropomorphic, it must be late.

Although scholars have continued to refine and modify the Wellhausen scheme,<sup>6</sup> it stands today on these same four criteria. Thus even scholars who developed new approaches, such as Gerhard von Rad, who used the form-critical approach that emphasized the oral transmission of stories

4. See J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. J. S. Menzies and A. Black (repr. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1983).

5. For discussions of these criteria, see, e.g., S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 12th ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1906), pp. 116–59; C. A. Simpson, *The Early Traditions of Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948); O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, tr. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 158–212, esp. 182–88; G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, tr. D. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), pp. 103–9.

6. See, e.g., the differences between the charts on the formation of the Pentateuch in the 2nd and 3rd eds. of B. W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 382; 3rd ed. (1975), p. 424.

textual units, and Martin Noth, who used the so-called traditio-historical approach that emphasized the shaping and reshaping of traditions rather than written documents, assumed the basic correctness of the documentary hypothesis in its main outlines.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, however, other scholars, like Rolf Rendtorff, recognized that the traditio-historical approach cannot be reconciled with the documentary hypothesis and have abandoned the latter in favor of a scheme based on the editing together of the larger units of the Pentateuch (i.e., such units of tradition as the patriarchal material in Gen. 12–50 and the Balaam stories in Num. 22–24). The whole was given its definitive stamp by an editor more or less closely aligned to the viewpoint of the Deuteronomy.<sup>8</sup>

The view connected with the name of Y. Kaufmann, and carried forward by such scholars as M. Weinfeld, A. Hurvitz, J. Milgrom and others, also deserves mention here.<sup>9</sup> While not denying the basic correctness of the written documents as such, this group of scholars has attempted to show that the so-called Priestly materials in the Pentateuch are pre-exilic rather than postexilic. They thoroughly criticize the unilinear evolutionary theory on which the dating of the documents rests. The laws and in-

7. See G. von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, tr. E. W. Trueman Dicken (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 1–78; M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, tr. B. W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), esp. pp. 1–10. The traditio-historical approach is also assumed in Noth's commentary on the book of Numbers.

8. See R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch*, BZAW 147 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), esp. pp. 1–28, 70–74, 147–150. A convenient summary of Rendtorff's view may be found in R. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, tr. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 160–165.

9. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, tr. and abridged by M. Green (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 153–211, esp. pp. 175–200 concerning the antiquity of the Priestly Code on such matters as the chosen site for worship, the festivals, the tent of meeting, the high priest and congregation, the clergy genealogy, as well as a discussion of priests and Levites. See, e.g., A. Hurvitz, "The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code," *RB* 81 (1974) 24–57. See also the work of Jacob Milgrom, e.g., in "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," *JQR* 69 (1978) 65–81; "The Term 'Abraham' in Studies in Levitical Terminology 1 (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1970) 60–87; "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *RB* 82 (1975) 186–205. These articles are now reprinted in *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, vol. 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1983) ix–66. See also Milgrom's *Jewish Publication Society Torah: Numbers B<sup>e</sup>Midbar* (Philadelphia/New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1975/1990), pp. xxxii–xxxv et passim. On Weinfeld see below, note 12.

tions discussed in the Priestly legislation and narrative simply do not fit in the postexilic age.<sup>10</sup> Specific studies of Priestly vocabulary also show that words long thought to be postexilic may more probably be dated to the preexilic period.<sup>11</sup> Also, these scholars show that Deuteronomy, which they date in the 7th cent., cites material from P, but P does not cite Deuteronomy.<sup>12</sup>

Although scholars from a wide variety of critical and theological perspectives have subjected every aspect of the documentary hypothesis to searching criticism,<sup>13</sup> it is unlikely that most scholars will return to the traditional position, since many would conclude that there is too much evidence for a long period of transmission standing behind the present text to return to a theory of Mosaic authorship. The present author includes himself in this group of many. On the other hand, the text itself is undeniably connected to Moses and this, too, must be taken into account.

In other words, to ignore lessons learned from either basic or advanced critical approach would be to ignore data presented by the text of Numbers itself. On the one hand, the traditional theory affirms the many and diverse unifying features of the book, which are anchored in the person of Moses. It seems difficult to deny his role in the origin of the book. On the other

10. See, e.g., A. Hurvitz, "The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code," *RB* 81 (1974) 24–57.

11. See, e.g., J. Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, SJLA 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1983), pp. ix–66.

12. See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 180–81.

13. From the conservative theological position see W. H. Green, *Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Scribner's, 1895); O. T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1941); and G. J. Harrison, *Introduction*, pp. 19–82, 351–61, 495–541. From the so-called Upper School, see I. Engnell, "Methodological Aspects of Old Testament Studies," *VTSup* 7 (Leiden: Brill 1960), pp. 13–30; idem, "The Traditio-Historical Method in Old Testament Research," in *Critical Essays on the Old Testament*, tr. J. V. Philips and H. Ringgren (London: SPCK, 1970), pp. 3–11; idem, "The Pentateuch," *ibid.*, pp. 50–67. See also U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis*, tr. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961); M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), pp. 1–170. An interesting study of one part of the Pentateuch is I. M. Kikawadze, "A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985). One of the most recent and trenchant criticisms of the documentary approach (as well as the traditio-historical approach) is R. N. Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup 53 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987). Whybray himself opts for a single sixth-century author for the Pentateuch who used earlier source materials.

hand, a great deal of evidence suggests a long period of transmission of some materials in the book. Most of the book presupposes a time later than the conquest, and particularly materials from ch. 22 on point to a date significantly later.<sup>14</sup> The evidence given especially by Kaufmann, Grom, et al., seems convincing, however, that one does not need to set so late a date as the postexilic era for the book in its more-or-less final form; a preexilic date is most likely, possibly in the time of the united monarchy.

It seems best to take the materials of the text itself as offering the best clue to the sources and composition of the book. Moses may be seen as having a key role in the origin of some of the material in Numbers, though we have no way of knowing how much of it goes back to him. Much of what is in the book bears marks of antiquity, but there are also undeniable signs of a long period of transmission. The book probably went through a more complex history of transmission than is recoverable. The best reasonable and practical approach to specific texts in Numbers is to explain what they mean as they stand in the final form of the text. The book did not simply fall together, and does make sense as it stands. A demonstration that the text makes sense will, of course, be more difficult in some cases than in others. I do not object to a literary theory of sources as such, but to the assumption that these sources were not compiled into a cogent text. When the text presents a literary difficulty, I will attempt to find a literary solution from within the text itself, having to do with the function of the text, rather than simply positing a combination of sources by an editor who had little appreciation for logic, cogency, and literary style. I believe that, through all the complexities of the transmission of the text of Numbers, God was at work to bring to his people the final form of the text. Inspiration should not be limited to any one stage in the composition of the biblical text (e.g., the earliest) as opposed to multiple stages. The Church and the Synagogue confess the whole OT text as God's Word, not just one stage in its composition.

14. E.g., the Balaam stories (chs. 22–24) would take some time to get into Israelite hands and, if they were genuinely non-Israelite, to be translated into Hebrew. Ch. 26 discusses clans of people rather than individual families, which suggests some time later than Moses. Ch. 36 assumes 27:1–11, etc. (see commentary below on these chapters).

## IV. THEOLOGICAL THEMES

The themes of obedience, disobedience, holiness, and the presence of Yahweh are keys to understanding the book of Numbers. For purposes of the present discussion it will be helpful to break the book into three constituent parts: Orientation (1:1–10:10), Disorientation (10:11–22:1), and New Orientation (22:1–36:13).<sup>1</sup> The travel sections (10:11–12:16; 20:1–22:1) are transitional.

The opening section (1:1–10:10) stresses the importance of obedience to Yahweh in the census (cf. 1:54), the camp (2:34), the presentation of offerings (ch. 7), and Israel's encampment/decampment (9:23). Yahweh's will is that Israel be *oriented* toward him as a holy people, separated from the uncleanness of the rest of the world, as seen in the separation of the Levites (chs. 3–4) and the Nazirites (ch. 6) from the rest of the people and the priests from the Levites (ch. 8). Yahweh's camp is a place where no uncleanness (e.g., leprosy) is allowed (5:1–4). Wrongs are not atoned for (5:5–10) and suspicions between husbands and wives (5:11–31) also bring uncleanness to Yahweh's holy people. The section concludes with the recognition that uncleanness will in fact be required, but it also shows Yahweh's gracious provision that feasts (e.g., Passover) may be postponed until cleanness is regained (9:1–14). The camp of the ideally constituted will have the numinous presence of Yahweh with the people as they move toward their destiny in Canaan (9:15–22).

After the command to depart is given (10:11–13), the people are shown at the sacred mountain in exact obedience to the instructions in ch. 10 (10:14–36). This obedience to Yahweh is the way for Israel to maintain holiness and orientation. What happens next, however, is almost instantaneous complaining and *disobedience*. In three scenes the complaints involve the people in general, the rabble (the non-Israelites who had come along with them; cf. Exod. 12:38), and even the family of Moses in ch. 11. Each disobedience brings immediate judgment from Yahweh (11:1–3).

1. These categories are drawn from W. Brueggemann's work on the Psalter, e.g., in "Psalms and the Life of Faith," *JSOT* 17 (1980) 3–31; J. Goldingay, "The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer," *JSOT* 20 (1981) 8–17; W. Brueggemann, "Response to John Goldingay's 'The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer,'" *JSOT* 22 (1982) 141–42. The scheme is also worked out in Brueggemann's *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1982) and *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg OT Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). I am not applying these terms in exactly the same way as Brueggemann does.

12:9–12). In this transitional section the paradigm of the central section of the book is set: painful disorientation for God’s people.

The story of the spies (chs. 13–14) is extremely important to understand the disorientation of the Israelites. In these chapters the people decide that Moses and Aaron (God’s chosen leaders) are not to be trusted to lead. Then, through fear, the people decide that, in spite of God’s promise to give them Canaan, they are not strong enough for the task. They go further, that they need to select a new leader who will take them back to Egypt. In effect they choose to go back to a time before Yahweh revealed himself to them at Sinai, when they were choosing “other gods” and God sees this act as rebellion. God’s response to this rebellion is a curse on the entire generation. The old generation had been afraid to go forward; now they would not go forward. They had been afraid that their children would die in the wilderness; now, *they* would die there. None of the Exodus generation over twenty years of age (except Caleb and Joshua) would go into Canaan. It was not possible to go back to Egypt. The Rebellion against Yahweh would, instead, lead to forty years’ wandering in the wilderness, making no progress toward the goal of God’s promise of land in Canaan (14:20–35), but it could not lead back to Egypt because the people were God’s in spite of their rebellion.

In ch. 15 God shows his continued care for Israel by giving supplementary laws for cereal and drink offerings, first fruits, and peace offerings. God is still working with the people in spite of their rebellion, but that the supposedly holy people are by this time so disoriented is seen in the further rebellions of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (ch. 16). These men are not satisfied with the leadership as God had given it; they want more power. The result is tragic and fatal (16:31–35; 17:1–16 [Eng. 16:41–50]). Yahweh’s presence brings awful judgment in the deaths of the spies and of Korah, in contrast to the cloudy pillar, which was to provide leadership on the way to Canaan in 1:1–10:10. In spite of the judgment, however, God affirms that the people are his (chs. 17–18). Once again he appoints the tribe of Levi in general and the family of Aaron in particular to stand as leaders of the people and intercessors between God and Israel (17:17–28 [Eng. 1–13]). Also, in response to the people’s terror, God changes the duties of both the priests and the Levites so that they can protect the people from future outbreaks of divine wrath. God moves forward with his people in their disorientation in order to reorient their lives.

In 20:1–22:1 the people begin moving back toward Canaan, but not so toward a new orientation to God’s will for them. At the beginning of this transitional section is the note of Miriam’s death (20:1), followed

immediately by a situation in which both Moses and Aaron commit a sin (20:2–13). Following the announcement of the impending doom of the Exodus leaders Moses and Aaron, the situation begins to move toward a better day. The king of Edom denies a request to pass through his land, but Israel suffers no defeat (20:14–21). When Aaron the high priest dies at Mt. Hor (20:22–29), it is the end of an era.<sup>2</sup>

After his death Israel gains a victory at Hormah (21:1–2) in contrast to the old and painful defeat there in 14:39–45 at the beginning of the period of disorientation. The incident of the fiery serpents shows that, although the people continue to complain and rebel, intercession now quick and effective, and the presence of God is both for judgment (21:6) and for salvation (21:8–9). The travel itinerary (20:10–20) shows even the wilderness wandering as making progress toward a goal, though God is involved in the process to bring about his purposes even in the face of human rebellion. Further evidences that the people are moving toward a new orientation are the two victories over Sihon the Amorite (21:21–24) and Og of Bashan (21:33–35).

As the Israelites arrive on the plains of Moab (22:1), they are at the threshold of a new orientation. The dominant theme in the last section of the book becomes the blessing of God in Canaan. The paradigm for this blessing is set by a non-Israelite seer named Balaam, who is hired to curse the Israelites by Balak of Moab (with the complicity of the Midianites) but instead blesses them four times (22:7–12, 13–26; 23:27–24:13; 24:1–19) and outlines God's promise for the future of this people (24:20–25). It has been apparent in chs. 13–19 that Israel can bring a curse upon themselves, but in spite of that curse, if the people obey, the future is laid open to them. None of their enemies could curse them, for Yahweh was intent on blessing a newly oriented Israel.

The incident concerning the Baal of Peor (ch. 25) is the last disorientation narrative in the book. Because of idolatry, once again God's presence becomes a consuming fire in the form of a plague (25:1b–5). The plague is stemmed when Phinehas acts in zeal to defend Yahweh's honor (25:6–9). The response of God is the future establishment of Phinehas's priestly line (25:10–15), thus showing, again, the final orientation of the whole last section of Numbers.

2. See the discussion on the death of the high priest in the commentary below on 35:25–28.

3. See the commentary below on these chapters, which contain some problems of interpretation.

Evidently the plague killed the last of the cursed Exodus generation. It was now time for a new beginning in earnest. A new covenant (26:1–51) reasserts the people's exact obedience to Yahweh's command through Moses. This is not, however, a simple return to the old orientation but a *new* orientation because it is a *new* generation.

From this point on the vast majority of material concerns the new land. The matters of daughters' inheritance rights (27:1–11; 36:1–13), the commissioning of Joshua as leader for the new day (27:12–23), the calendar of feasts for regular celebration of Yahweh's presence in the land (28:1–29:40), of vows (30:1–16), of the division of certain parts of the Transjordan (32:1–42) and Canaan proper (34:1–49), of the boundaries of Canaan (34:1–29), of the Levites' cities (35:1–8), and of the cities of refuge (35:9–34) all point toward the good future in the land that Yahweh will give. Punishment of Midian (31:1–54) and destruction of the other Canaanites (33:50–56) are reaffirmations of the importance of orientation toward Yahweh and Yahweh alone. The long list of cities (33:1–49) puts the whole journey from Egypt to Canaan under the direction of Yahweh, who has guided even through the rebellions of Israel.

The obvious fact is that Numbers ends on the plains of Moab with Moses alive. The death of Moses is postponed until Deut. 34, which serves to link Numbers with Deuteronomy. The story of Numbers is a journey without a conclusion. The future is open to God's people, but it is uncertain. It will depend on whether his people maintain their orientation toward him and him alone. Every new generation of God's people faces the same uncertainty, but also has the same promise of blessing.<sup>4</sup>

Minor themes in the book of Numbers will be discussed as they are met in the commentary proper (e.g., the theme of leadership in 11:4–35; 16:1–17:28 [Eng. 16:1–17:13]; etc.).

## V. TEXT AND VERSIONS

Because of the importance of the Torah to Judaism, the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch, including that of the book of Numbers, is on the whole well preserved and free from problems.<sup>1</sup> Most of the textual difficulties

4. On the theology of the book, see esp. Olson, *Death of the Old Testament*, 179–98.

1. See P. K. McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, OT Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 88. On general textual criticism, in addition to McCarter, see

arise in the poetic bits of ch. 21 and in the Balaam oracles of chs. 22–24. Since neither the Sam. Pent. nor the LXX renders much help in reconstructing the original text of these passages, these textual problems are probably older than either of these versions (see below).

The Masoretes produced a text (MT) that, with the exception of the above-named passages, shows little significant variation among the extant mss. At several points in the text of Numbers the Masoretes inserted readings or notes that are significant. The so-called *special points* (*piqqula extraordinaria*) mark particular words in the text to show Masoretic awareness of textual or doctrinal reservations about that word (or passage) in the tradition of their community.<sup>3</sup> The *inverted nuns* that mark Num. 10:35–36 probably show that these verses were considered to be out of place.<sup>4</sup> The *Sebir notes* (Aram. *s<sup>e</sup>bir*; “supposed”) occur over twenty times in the book (and often elsewhere) and seem to be used as a sign that the marginal reading is the more usual or commonly occurring form.<sup>5</sup>

The Sam. Pent. is a different Hebrew recension from the MT, and was written in a special Hebrew script.<sup>6</sup> The date of this recension is unknown.

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following: for an introduction to *BHS*, E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*, tr. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); more briefly, see S. K. Soderlund, “Text and MSS of the Old Testament,” *ISBE*, rev., IV:798–814; B. K. Waltke, “The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” in *EBC*, vol. I: *General Articles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 211–28; and B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §§ 1.5–6.

2. See the commentary below on Num. 20:14–15, 17–18, 27–30; 23:19–24; 24:3–9, 15–19, 20–24.

3. E.g., the point at 3:39 shows Masoretic awareness of the difference between the number of Levites given in the text itself (22,000) and the actual number of adding the figures found in ch. 3 (22,300). See the commentary below on Num. 3:39. The special points occur in *BHS* at Gen. 16:5; 18:9; 33:4; 37:12; Num. 3:39; 21:30; 29:15; Deut. 29:28; 2 Sam. 19:20; Isa. 44:9; Ezek. 41:20; 46:22; Ps. 2:12.

4. Some scholars think that these verses came from another source and were themselves another source. On these inverted *nuns*, see S. Z. Leiman, “Inverted *Nuns* at Num. 10:35–36 and the Book of Eldad and Medad,” *JBL* 93 (1974) 348–55; for a critique of Leiman, see B. Levine, “More on the Inverted *Nuns* at Num. 10:35–36,” *JBL* 95 (1976) 122–24. The LXX has 10:35–36 before 10:34.

5. *Sebir* notes occur in *BHS* at Num. 4:3, 19, 36; 7:3; 8:4, 16; 11:15; 13:22; 14:25; 18:23; 22:5, 12; 23:18; 26:51; 31:50, 52; 32:23, 25, 32; 33:8; 35:5. For more on the special points and *Sebir* notes, as well as other Masoretic notes, see Würthwein, *Text of the OT*, pp. 17–21. See also the notes to the translations of each of the passages listed above in the commentary.

6. The primary edition of the Sam. Pent. is A. von Gall, ed., *De*

estimates range from the 4th to the 1st cent. B.C.<sup>7</sup> The Sam. Pent. differs from the MT some 6,000 times, 1,900 of these in agreement with the LXX. It is a full text in that it tends to expand on the MT, not only in the direction of giving special place to the theology of the Samaritan sect, but also in the direction of incorporation of readings from similar texts elsewhere in the OT into the text. In the book of Numbers the longest and perhaps the most significant variants are additions from Deut. 1–3 (e.g., Deut. 1:6–7 inserted after Num. 10:10; Deut. 1:20–23a after Num. 12:16).<sup>8</sup> Especially interesting are the interpolations from Deut. 2 into the travel narrative of Num. 21.<sup>9</sup> These add bits of dialogue to the rather colorless MT, but not all of these readings should be considered original.

The Pentateuch of the LXX (or Old Greek version) is usually dated to the 3rd cent. B.C.<sup>10</sup> In Numbers, as in the rest of the Pentateuch, the LXX offers for the most part a translation of the MT into idiomatic Greek.<sup>11</sup> Most of the variant readings in the LXX are in the spellings of names; in a few cases the LXX order of verses differs from the MT.<sup>12</sup> The LXX is frequently longer than the MT, but occasionally it is shorter.<sup>13</sup> While

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*bräischer Pentateuch der Samaritaner*, 5 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1914–18; repr. 1966). On this recension see Würthwein, *Text of the OT*, pp. 42–44; B. W. Winter, “The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Text of the Old Testament,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Payne (Waco: Word, 1970), pp. 212–39; more briefly, J. D. Purvis, “Samaritan Pentateuch,” *IDBSup*, pp. 772–75.

7. See Würthwein, *Text of the OT*, p. 42; Purvis, “Samaritan Pentateuch,” p. 775.

8. See Gray, p. xli.

9. Deut. 2:9 is inserted after Num. 21:11; Deut. 2:17–19 after Num. 21:12; Deut. 2:24–25 after Num. 21:20; Deut. 2:28–29a after Num. 21:22; and Deut. 2:30–31 after Num. 21:23a. For more, see Gray, p. xli.

10. On the LXX see H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, rev. A. Otlety (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1902; repr. 1968); S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); idem, *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recension, and Interpretations* (New York: KTAV, 1973); R. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: From the Septuagint to Qumran*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); more briefly, R. A. Kraft, “Septuagint,” *IDBSup*, pp. 807–15; S. K. Soderlund, “Septuagint,” *ISBE*, rev., IV:400–401.

11. See McCarter, *Textual Criticism*, p. 88; Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, p. 88.

12. A different order occurs as follows: LXX 1:26–37 = MT 1:26–37; LXX 2:24–25; LXX 26:15–47 = MT 26:19–27, 15–18, 44–47, 28–43 (these two passages show a different order of the tribes in the two census documents); LXX 6:2–3 = MT 6:22–23, 27, 24–26.

13. The LXX is longer, e.g., in 2:7; 3:10; 7:88; and shorter, e.g., in 9:20–23. For more examples, see Gray, p. xli.

possible that some LXX readings preserve a different (perhaps older) tradition than the MT, each LXX reading must be assessed to determine this.

The Qumran materials do not yield much in the way of significant textual variants.<sup>14</sup> Most of what has been published consists of scattered words and lines of text, some of which show affinity with the Sam. and LXX readings.<sup>15</sup> A single ms. found in Cave 4 gives portions of 3:30–4:14 in a Greek version that generally follows the LXX text, but with some variants.<sup>16</sup>

The Vulg. on the book of Numbers was translated by St. Jerome sometime between A.D. 390 and about 405. Although Jerome undertook to translate the Hebrew OT rather than the LXX into Latin, he also admitted to using the LXX as well as the other Greek Versions (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion). Scholars have also detected traces of the conclusions of some rabbinic exegesis in the translation. B. J. Roberts concludes a summary of the nature of the Vulg. OT in the following way:

Our conclusion, then, regarding the nature of Jerome's translation is that when due allowance is made for all external influences, it must be admitted that his method was neither straightforward nor consistent.

In sum, the MT is generally preferable to the variant readings of the Sam. Pent., LXX, Vulg., or the Qumran materials. The translation is

14. The texts from Qumran are: 1QLev (fragments of 1:48–50, possibly 36:7–8), published in D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik, *Qumrân Cave 1* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), pp. 51–54; MurNum (fragments of 34:1–2 and about 8 partial lines from 36:7–11), published in P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, eds., *Les grottes de Murabba'at*, DJD 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), pp. 10–11; The very interesting 2QNum<sup>a</sup> (3:38–41; 3:51–4:3), along with 2QNum<sup>b</sup> (3:52–53), 2QNum<sup>c</sup> (7:88), and 2QNum<sup>d</sup> (18:8–9), is published in M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, eds., *Les "petites grottes" de Qumrân*, DJD 3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), pp. 57–60. For the preliminary publication of 5/6 HevNum (20:1–2) see Y. Yadin, "Expedition D — The Cave of the Letters," *IEJ* 12 (1962) 229–230; preliminary publication of parts of 4QLXXNum (fragments of 3:38–4:14) is published in P. W. Skehan, "The Qumran Manuscripts and Textual Criticism," in *Texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1957), pp. 155–57.

15. See Skehan, "Qumran Manuscripts," p. 149.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 155–57.

17. B. J. Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions: The Hebrew Text in Transmission and the History of the Ancient Versions* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1951), p. 258; the whole section on the Vulg. (pp. 247–65) may be consulted with profit. See also Würthwein, *Text of the OT*, pp. 91–95. Especially helpful is G. R. Gribomont, *IDB(Sup)*, pp. 527–32.

## VI. ANALYSIS OF CONTENTS

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    6. Preparations to Depart (9:15–10:10)
      - a. Fiery Cloud (9:15–23)
      - b. Silver Trumpets (10:1–10)
- II. THE JOURNEY FROM MT. SINAI TO KADESH-BARNEA (10:11–12:16)
  - A. Departure from Mt. Sinai (10:11–36)

- B. Crises of Authority on the Way (11:1–12:16)
  - 1. At Taberah (11:1–3)
  - 2. At Kibroth-hattaavah (11:4–35)
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- III. IN AND AROUND KADESH-BARNEA (13:1–19:22)
  - A. The Spies (13:1–14:45)
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    - 2. Spies Go and Return (13:17–33)
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      - c. The People Attempt to Enter Canaan (14:39–45)
  - B. Cultic Legislation (15:1–41)
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    - 2. First of the Dough (15:17–21)
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    - 4. Case Law on Capital Punishment for Sabbath Violation (15:32–36)
    - 5. Tassels on Garments for Remembrance (15:37–41)
  - C. Legitimation of Aaron's Priesthood (16:1–17:28 [Eng. 13])
    - 1. Rebellions of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (16:1–35)
    - 2. Aftermath of Rebellions (17:1–15 [Eng. 16:36–50])
    - 3. Aaron's Budding Rod (17:16–28 [Eng. 17:1–13])
  - D. Further Cultic Legislation (18:1–19:22)
    - 1. Redefined Role for Priests and Levites (18:1–32)
      - a. Responsibilities of Priests and Levites (18:1–7)
      - b. Support of Priests (18:8–20)
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      - d. Tithe of the Tithe (18:25–32)
    - 2. The Red Cow (19:1–22)
      - a. Making the Waters of Impurity (19:1–10)
      - b. Using the Waters of Impurity (19:11–22)
- IV. THE JOURNEY FROM KADESH-BARNEA TO THE PLAIN OF MOAB (20:1–22:1)
  - A. Death of Miriam and Disaster at Meribah (20:1–13)
  - B. Request to Pass through Edom (20:14–21)
  - C. Death of Aaron (20:22–29)
  - D. Second Battle of Hormah (21:1–3)
  - E. Fiery Serpents (21:4–9)
  - F. Travel Itinerary (21:10–20)

- G. Wars against Sihon and Og (21:21–22:1)
- V. ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB (22:2–36:13)
  - A. Story of Balaam (22:2–24:25)
    - 1. Encounter between Balak and Balaam (22:2–40)
      - a. Messengers Find Balaam (22:2–21)
      - b. Balaam and the Donkey (22:22–35)
      - c. Balak Meets with Balaam (22:36–40)
    - 2. First and Second Oracles (22:41–23:30)
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  - B. Incident of Baal-Peor (25:1–18)
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  - D. Daughters of Zelophehad (27:1–11)
  - E. Joshua Named as Moses' Successor (27:12–23)
  - F. Further Legislation (28:1–30:17 [Eng. 16])
    - 1. Cultic Calendar (28:1–30:1 [Eng. 28:1–29:40])
    - 2. Women's Vows (30:2–17 [Eng. 1–16])
  - G. War with Midian (31:1–54)
  - H. Transjordanian Inheritance (32:1–42)
  - I. Travel Itinerary (33:1–49)
  - J. Regulations for Living in Canaan (33:50–36:13)
    - 1. Introduction: Canaanites Must Be Expelled (33:50–56)
    - 2. Borders of the Land (34:1–15)
    - 3. Leaders to Draw Israel's Borders (34:16–29)
    - 4. Cities of the Levites (35:1–8)
    - 5. Cities of Refuge (35:9–34)
    - 6. Additional Legislation for Daughters of Zelophehad (36:1–13)

## VII. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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# I. PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE (1:1–10:10)

These chapters deal with the Hebrews' preparation to leave Mt. Sinai for the land of promise. Since the events recounted here take place at Sinai, these chapters link with the material that has gone before in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the setup of the camp is given makes it clear that this material narrates the final preparation for departure, which occurs in what follows.

At first glance these chapters may seem to be a miscellaneous collection; closer attention reveals that the central theme around which they turn is holiness.<sup>2</sup> Although on one level these chapters simply narrate preparation to leave Sinai, on another level they show the importance of holiness in the camp (e.g., ch. 2), in dealing with the tabernacle (e.g., chs. 3–4; 5:1–4), and with various incidents in the life of the people (e.g., 5:5–10, 11–31).

One may divide this unit into subsections in various ways. In the commentary the division comes between chs. 6 and 7, for ch. 1 begins with a chronological indicator (v. 1), ch. 6 ends with a benediction (22–27), ch. 7 also begins with a chronological indicator (v. 1), and 10:11 concludes with the statement *I am Yahweh your God*, a typical concluding formula. Further, 10:11 begins with a new chronological note.

That this unit has sources is undeniable. Those who adhere to the so-called documentary hypothesis along lines classically set down by J. Wellhausen would agree that Numbers comes from the P source. Other, less hypothetical sources may underlie 1:1–10:10, such as the list

1. This link is also seen in that, in Hebrew, the book begins with a *waw*-consecutive construction, which is dependent (at least supposedly) on the previous verb (i.e., in Leviticus) for its meaning; cf. GKC, § 49b n. 1.

2. See B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 196.

names and of tribes, census lists, and legal enactments (or narratives and such enactments) found in the present text.

## A. MATTERS CONCERNING THE PEOPLE AND THE CAMP (1:1–6:27)

### 1. THE CENSUSES AND THE ARRANGEMENTS OF THE MARCH (1:1–4:49)

The first subsection deals with God’s people and their camp. In every way they are to be a holy nation. The first four chapters deal with the selection of Moses’ helpers, the first lay census, the marching order, and the Levitical censuses.

#### a. First Lay Census (1:1–54)

##### (1) The Leaders (1:1–16)

- 1 And Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the meeting, on the first day<sup>1</sup> of the second month in the second year after the exodus from the land of Egypt, saying,
- 2 “Calculate the total of all the congregation of the children of Israel, as regards their clans, as regards their fathers’ houses according to the number of their names, every male, individual according to twenty years old upward, all in Israel going out to the land; you will number them by their companies, you and Aaron.
- 4 And with you shall be one man for each tribe,<sup>2</sup> each man the head of his father’s house.
- 5 And these are the names of the men who will stand with you: from Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur;
- 6 from Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai;
- 7 from Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab;
- 8 from Issachar, Nathanel the son of Zuar;
- 9 from Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon;
- 10 from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur;

1. MT has no word for “day”; Biblical Hebrew commonly omits the terms after numerals (GKC, § 134n).

2. *’iš ’iš lammatteh* expresses the distributive thought, “one man for each tribe.” *’iš* is also used distributively in the next clause: *’iš rō’ š l<sup>e</sup> bêt-’<sup>a</sup> bōtāy* “each man the head of his father’s house”; cf. GKC, § 124d.