

NUMBERS PROFILE

AUTHOR

Though challenged by some critical scholars, there are no compelling reasons to deny Mosaic authorship of Numbers. The external and internal evidence for Mosaic authorship is convincing.

External:

- A uniform ancient testimony (Jews, Samaritans, and the early church) supports the Mosaic authorship of Numbers.
- The New Testament cites events from Numbers and associates them with Moses (John 3:14; Acts 7 and 13; I Cor 10:1-11; Hebrews 3 and 4; Jude 11).

Internal:

- There are more than eighty claims in the book of Numbers that “the Lord spoke to Moses.”
- Numbers 33:2 makes this clear statement: “Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the Lord.”
- As the central character in Exodus through Deuteronomy, Moses was better qualified than any other man to write these books.

DATE AND OCCASION

The precise date of composition is uncertain, though it doubtless occurred during the period after the wilderness wandering (which followed the Exodus) and before the death of Moses in 1406 B.C.

Israel as a nation is in its infancy at the outset of this book, only thirteen months after the exodus from Egypt. In Numbers, it becomes necessary for the nation to go through the painful process of testing and maturation. God must teach His people the consequences of irresponsible decisions (An eleven-day journey becomes a forty-year agony!). The forty-years of wilderness experience transforms them from a rabble of ex-slaves into a nation ready to take the Promised Land.

PURPOSE AND THEMES

Numbers begins with the preparation for the march across the wilderness, describes the failure of faith that led the exodus generation of Israelites to refuse to undertake the conquest of the Promised Land, tells of the forty-years of waiting until a whole generation would die, and ends with the preparation for entering Canaan. Given its content, Numbers was evidently written as a warning to the generation of Israelites born in the wilderness that they should persevere in faith and obedience where their parents had not. For future generations of God’s people, the book would speak a similar message. The following is a brief thematic outline of the book of Leviticus:

(1:1-10:10) Preparations for Battle: In order for God’s people to be victorious in battle, they must go forth in purity.

(10:11-25:18) Defeat in the Wilderness: When God’s people disobey through unbelief, they are defeated in battle thereby missing the blessings of God.

(26:1-36:13) The New Generation: God continues to fulfill His promises through a new generation whom He prepares to take the land.

(Portions of this information were drawn directly from *The Reformation Study Bible*, *The Open Bible*, and lecture notes taken from *Genesis through Joshua*, by Dr. Richard P. Belcher, Jr.)