

## Numbers

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at [www.openarms-communityofchrist.org](http://www.openarms-communityofchrist.org).*

The book of Numbers gets its name from the two times the people of Israel are numbered. The first is at the beginning of their journey out of slavery at Mount Sinai. At this time, the tribe of Levi was also dedicated to priestly service and various vows and offerings were also established.

In between these two numberings, there are stories that show the struggles of the people as they moved from the relative security of slavery in Egypt to the precarious insecurity of freedom in the wilderness.

They complained about the difficulty of getting food—so God provided manna and quail for them. However, they still struggled with greed, gathering more than God told them to.

There were also struggles with who was going to be the leader of the people. Moses provided for seventy elders to be his assistants, but Miriam and Aaron (his sister and brother) also thought they should have more of the privilege of leadership as well.

Moses sent out twelve spies to check out the promised land. When they return, two (Joshua and Caleb) want to follow God's lead into the land, but the other ten are frightened of the inhabitants. Because of this lack of faith, God tells them that the generation that left Egypt will all die before they can enter the promised land.

After a long period of time (traditionally 40 years), the new generation continues the journey and they easily destroy two nations that stand in the way. The king of Moab (Balak) sends his prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites. On the way there, Balaam's donkey sees an angel, refuses to move, and Balaam's eyes are eventually opened to see the angel as well. The angel tells him only to bless the people—which he does.

Eventually the people begin to intermarry with the people of Moab and begin to worship their god Baal. A plague is sent, killing a large number, and the book ends with the taking of another census and Joshua assuming leadership as the people finally prepare to enter the promised land.