

Numbers: The Wilderness Wanderings

In Hebrew, the fourth book of the Bible is titled *Be-midbar*, which literally means "in the wilderness." This is perhaps the most accurate description of its contents. The names we use today—*Arithmoi* in Greek and *Numeri* in Latin—translate to "Numbers," a title chosen because the book begins and ends with a formal census of the Israelites.

However, Numbers is more than a ledger of names; it is a chronicle of arrested progress. While the Exodus from Egypt was a journey of forty hours, the journey of getting "Egypt" out of the hearts of the Israelites took forty years.

The Crisis at Kadesh-Barnea

Numbers picks up where Exodus leaves off. The pivotal moment occurs at Kadesh-Barnea. After forty days of scouting the Promised Land, twelve spies returned with their reports:

- The Ten Spies: Reported a land of "giants" (*Nephilim*), claiming the Israelites looked like mere grasshoppers in comparison. Paralyzed by fear, they lacked the faith to move forward.
- Joshua and Caleb: Acknowledged the challenges but remained steadfast in their faith. They argued that because God was on their side, the enemy was already defeated.

Unfortunately, the congregation sided with the fearful majority. Their "murmuring" reached a breaking point when they cried out, "*Would God that we had died in this wilderness!*" God granted that grim wish. He decreed that every person twenty years and older would perish in the desert over the next forty years—one year for every day the spies spent in the land—leaving only the next generation, led by Joshua and Caleb, to enter the promise.

Divine "Types" and Models

The Apostle Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 10 that these events serve as *tupos* (types)—patterns or "prototypes" intended for our instruction. Numbers highlights three specific "types" of Christ:

1. The Manna

To sustain millions in a barren wasteland, God provided "bread from heaven." It appeared six days a week, with a double portion on the sixth day to honor the Sabbath. This miracle sustained the physical life of the nation, foreshadowing Jesus as the "Bread of Life."

2. The Brazen Serpent

When the people's complaints brought a plague of fiery serpents, God instructed Moses to forge a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole.

- The Symbolism: In biblical typology, brass signifies judgment and the serpent signifies sin.

- The Connection: In John 3, Jesus explicitly links this event to His crucifixion: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent... even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" Just as the Israelites were healed by looking at the bronze serpent, humanity finds salvation by looking to Christ on the cross.

3. The Waters of Meribah

Twice, God provided water from a rock.

- First Instance: God told Moses to strike the rock (Exodus 17).
- Second Instance: God told Moses to speak to the rock (Numbers 20).

Frustrated by the people, Moses struck the rock a second time instead of speaking to it. While water still flowed, Moses was barred from the Promised Land for his disobedience. Paul explains that "the Rock was Christ." By striking it twice, Moses broke the divine "type": Christ was to be struck (crucified) only once; thereafter, His people need only speak to Him to receive living water.

The Layout of the Camp

The organization of the tribes in Numbers 2 reveals a stunning visual. The twelve tribes were grouped into four major camps, each with a specific standard (symbol):

Camp Leader	Standard/Symbol	Direction	Population
Judah	Lion	East	186,400
Reuben	Man	South	151,000
Ephraim	Ox	West	108,100
Dan	Eagle	North	157,600

Interestingly, these four symbols (Lion, Man, Ox, Eagle) mirror the faces of the cherubim described in the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation.

Furthermore, when you plot the tribal populations and their required cardinal positions around the Tabernacle, the camp does not form a simple square. Because of the disproportionate number of people in the East and West camps compared to the North and South, the entire encampment, when viewed from above, would have formed the distinct shape of a **Cross**.

