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The book of Numbers receives its English name, 'Numbers,' from the Latin Vulgate name, '*Numeri*,' which focuses on the census that occupies a significant part of the early section of the book. The Latin title originally was taken from the LXX, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible, the document goes by the Hebrew name, 'במדבר,' meaning 'in the wilderness.'

The contents of Numbers tend to cause many modern readers, especially Christians, to jump over this document to something more interesting. The listing of the various laws, along with rituals and ceremonies, is not the most entertaining nor enriching reading that one can do. Over the centuries of Christian use, the tendency has been either to ignore the book or to use allegorical means of interpretation in order to falsely read spiritual edification back into the text. Either approach is wrong. Numbers deserves to be read for what it is, a depiction of the journey of the Israelites through the Exodus. From such historical reading, some insights can be gleaned for our spiritual enrichment. This seems to be the apostle Paul's point in 1 Cor. 10:11 regarding the story of the Israelites in the wilderness (NRSV): "These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come."

## I. The Context

Again, context is all important to correct Bible interpretation. Unlike with NT documents, OT writings take on a somewhat different tone in certain aspects of context. The historical dimension is a bit different simply because authorship issues were virtually unimportant during the era of the OT. To be sure, concrete individuals were involved in the composition of the various documents, but these individuals were and remain anonymous. The central character of the document, especially the prophets, will be the focus of attention. To ancient Jews, who wrote the document was unimportant. With the literary aspects, patterns of thinking among ancient Jews are dramatically different than modern American patterns. Sometimes this complicates the process of understanding significantly. Yet, in spite of these barriers the OT writings continue to possess important spiritual insights that can greatly enrich our lives today.

### a. Historical

No one knows for certain who was responsible for the final composition of this document. Like virtually all the documents in the OT, this book underwent successive revisions and expansions over time until reaching the form that we know, from during the time of the Babylonian Exile. For most OT scholars, the traditional issue of authorship is replaced by an effort to trace the various sources of materials that have been utilized in pulling the document together in its current form.

The general consensus is that our passage, 10:11-28, comes from the Priestly Code tradition (known by the letter P). This material was pulled together in its final form "in the wake of the Babylonian exile (587-539 B.C.E.)" (IDB). The concern evidently was intended to preserve as carefully as possible the various traditions regarding the rituals and ceremonies for worship in the temple, in light of God's wrath being poured down on the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians. For more details on the various legal codes in the Pentateuch, see my *Biblical Law Codes* page at <http://cranfordville.com/OT->

..... It's in the *OT Study Aids* section of the *Bible Study Aids*. Thus the final editors of the book of Numbers incorporated this material into the document for that purpose.

The above treats what is commonly referred to as the external history, that is, the history of the composition of the document. But the internal history, that is, the history described inside the book, plays an important role in this passage. The setting of 10:11-28 is at Mt. Sinai during the Exodus. The focus of the passage is on the Israelites' departure from Sinai to begin the long pilgrimage to the Promised Land.

Although certainty is not possible, a common understanding is that the Exodus and wilderness wanderings occurred from about 1290 to 1250 B.C.E. Mt. Sinai was actually Mt. Horeb where Moses first encountered God who sent him back into Egypt to liberate the Israelite people. The Bible is clear at this point. However, when one tries to locate Mt. Sinai on a map, at least a couple of possible locations will be highlighted. The traditional location is at Jebel Musa, the modern Hebrew name, in the southwestern part of the Sinai desert. Another location, Jebel Hilal, is much further north. Exactly where Mt. Horeb was located is uncertain. Note these issues on the following map.



Regardless of the precise location, the sequence of events that happened is the heart of the story. Once the Egyptian pharaoh agreed to let the children of Israel leave Egypt, Moses led the group of slaves out of Egypt and headed them east toward the Land of Promise. After the miraculous deliverance at the Sea of Reeds, the group eventually arrived at Horeb and camped. Exodus 12 - 18 describes all this. The remainder of the book of Exodus describes some of the events that took place while at Mt. Sinai. The giving of the divine law, the Torah, was the major event. These chapters of Exodus, Leviticus, most of Numbers, and large chunks of Deuteronomy contain [the various legal codes](#). These represent three versions of the code: The Covenant Code (mostly in Exodus); The Priestly Code (Numbers and Leviticus); and The Deuteronomical Code (mostly in Deuteronomy). Although pledging themselves to obey God's Law, the Israelites right off the bat got themselves into trouble with disobedience, as described in Exodus 32. But at

God's signal, the camp was disassembled and the people prepared to march again. This is where our passage picks up the narrative.

### **b. Literary**

The book itself has no real organizational structure, at least one that follows detectable structuring of materials. Outlining the document is thus arbitrary and somewhat subjective. Literarily, the book seems to have two major sections, oriented around the two census of the people. Chapters 1-25 relate to the first census, while chapters 26-36 relate to the second census. The first section basically traces the demise of the first generation who rebelled in the wilderness and were not allowed to enter Caanan. The second section tells the story of the subsequent generation who eventually made it into Caanan.

This our passage, 10:11-28, in this first section gives attention to the departure from Sinai.

The NRSV breaks the passage into four paragraphs of text units: vv. 11-16; 17-20; 21-24; 25-28. But a careful study of the contents of the scripture text suggests a better organization is along the lines of a twofold division of the ideas: (1) The Trip (vv. 11-12); (2) Organized to Travel (vv. 13-28). This is how we will approach the text.

## **II. The Message**

### **1. The Trip, 10:11-12**

#### **NASB**

11 Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; 12 and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran.

#### **NRSV**

11 In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. 12 Then the Israelites set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran.

#### **NLT**

11 One day in mid-spring, during the second year after Israel's departure from Egypt, the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle of the Covenant. 12 So the Israelites set out from the wilderness of Sinai and traveled on in stages until the cloud stopped in the wilderness of Paran.

#### **Comments:**

The departure day came nineteen days after the census of the people (Num 1:1), and eleven months after arriving at Sinai (Ex. 19:1). The New Living Translation, "one day in mid-spring," seeks to provide clear reference from our calendar. In the ancient Hebrew calendar the second month was Iyyar and occurred from late March through mid April. Thus the Israelites had been at Sinai for about a year. This time allowed them to celebrate the Passover for the first time after leaving Egypt (cf. 9:1-14).

The signal to move came from the Lord in the form of the lifting of the cloud over the tabneracle. This was in accordance with the instructions that had been given to Moses (cf. 9:15-23). From the time of the building of the tabernacle, God's presence had been symbolized by the presence of a cloud over the tabernacle during the daylight hours and then by fire during the night time. The lifting of the cloud meant the Israelites were to break camp and follow the cloud to where it came to a stand still. There they were to set up camp, until the repetition of this same signal to move.

The journey, according to verse 12, would take them from Sinai to the wilderness of Paran. Note the map on the preceding page for an approximation of Paran. The wilderness of Paran covered a wide territory. 1 Kings 11:18 indicates it was located between Egypt and Midian. It had been home to Ishmael and Hagar according to Gen. 21:21, and Abraham had fought a king from there according to Gen. 14:6. Num. 12:16 describes their arrival at Paran. In between would be times of complaining and divine judgment. They would stay in Paran until their departure for Kadesh-Barnea in the wilderness of Zin (Num. 20:1). Their stay in Paran, evidently close to a year, would bring disaster when the people rebelled against the report of the spies and refused to enter the promised land as God directed.

Connections to our experience from these verses are difficult to make. Perhaps the clearest spiritual principle of these verses is the example of taking action at God's directive. The Israelites were to move

only when God told them to do so. He made His desires clearly known to them through the cloud. This truth holds for worshippers of God today. Following His leadership remains central to the commitment of Christians. Additionally, the wilderness journey is an image picked up in places of the NT as a kind of paradigm for the Christian life. Our life on planet earth is similar to the Israelites' experience in certain ways. Life here is temporary, not permanent. Life here involves hardships and overcoming obstacles; it's not paradise. We shouldn't become very attached to anything in this life; we are journeying toward something more permanent and this should be our focus.

## 2 Organized to Travel, vv. 13-28

### NASB

13 So they moved out for the first time according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses. 14 The standard of the camp of the sons of Judah, according to their armies, set out first, with Nahshon the son of Amminadab, over its army, 15 and Nethanel the son of Zuar, over the tribal army of the sons of Issachar; 16 and Eliab the son of Helon over the tribal army of the sons of Zebulun. 17 Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, who were carrying the tabernacle, set out. 18 Next the standard of the camp of Reuben, according to their armies, set out with Elizur the son of Shedeur, over its army, 19 and Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai over the tribal army of the sons of Simeon, 20 and Eliasaph the son of Deuel was over the tribal army of the sons of Gad. 21 Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy objects; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. 22 Next the standard of the camp of the sons of Ephraim, according to their armies, was set out, with Elishama the son of Ammihud over its army, 23 and Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur over the tribal army of the sons of Manasseh; 24 and Abidan the son of Gideon over the tribal army of the sons of Benjamin. 25 Then the standard of the camp of the sons of Dan, according to their armies, which formed

### NRSV

13 They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses. 14 The standard of the camp of Judah set out first, company by company, and over the whole company was Nahshon son of Amminadab. 15 Over the company of the tribe of Issachar was Nethanel son of Zuar; 16 and over the company of the tribe of Zebulun was Eliab son of Helon. 17 Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and the Merarites, who carried the tabernacle, set out. 18 Next the standard of the camp of Reuben set out, company by company; and over the whole company was Elizur son of Shedeur. 19 Over the company of the tribe of Simeon was Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, 20 and over the company of the tribe of Gad was Eliasaph son of Deuel. 21 Then the Kohathites, who carried the holy things, set out; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. 22 Next the standard of the Ephraimite camp set out, company by company, and over the whole company was Elishama son of Ammihud. 23 Over the company of the tribe of Manasseh was Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, 24 and over the company of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan son of Gideon. 25 Then the standard of the camp of Dan, acting as the rear guard of all the camps, set out, company by com-

### NLT

13 When the time to move arrived, the LORD gave the order through Moses. 14 The tribes that camped with Judah headed the march with their banner, under the leadership of Nahshon son of Amminadab. 15 The tribe of Issachar was led by Nethanel son of Zuar. 16 The tribe of Zebulun was led by Eliab son of Helon. 17 Then the Tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonite and Merarite divisions of the Levites were next in the line of march, carrying the Tabernacle with them. 18 Then the tribes that camped with Reuben set out with their banner, under the leadership of Elizur son of Shedeur. 19 The tribe of Simeon was led by Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. 20 The tribe of Gad was led by Eliasaph son of Deuel. 21 Next came the Kohathite division of the Levites, carrying the sacred objects from the Tabernacle. When they arrived at the next camp, the Tabernacle would already be set up at its new location. 22 Then the tribes that camped with Ephraim set out with their banner, under the leadership of Elishama son of Ammihud. 23 The tribe of Manasseh was led by Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. 24 The tribe of Benjamin was led by Abidan son of Gideon. 25 Last of all, the tribes that camped with Dan set out under their banner. They served as the rear guard for all

the rear guard for all the camps, set out, with Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai over its army, 26 and Pagiel the son of Ocran over the tribal army of the sons of Asher; 27 and Ahira the son of Enan over the tribal army of the sons of Naphtali. 28 This was the order of march of the sons of Israel by their armies as they set out.

pany, and over the whole company was Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. 26 Over the company of the tribe of Asher was Pagiel son of Ocran, 27 and over the company of the tribe of Naphtali was Ahira son of Enan. 28 This was the order of march of the Israelites, company by company, when they set out.

the tribal camps. The tribe of Dan headed this group, under the leadership of Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. 26 The tribe of Asher was led by Pagiel son of Ocran. 27 The tribe of Naphtali was led by Ahira son of Enan. 28 This was the order in which the tribes marched, division by division.

**Comments:**

Their moving out of the campsite was in orderly fashion, as described in verses 13-28. The nature of the description follows a regimented militia style march, as shown in the chart to the left. The Hebrew term

for 'standard' alludes to the four tribes -- Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan -- that led the four groups (cf. Num. 2:3, 10, 18, 25). Each tribe had a leader who directed his group. These were the men who had assisted in the taking of the first census described in Num. 1:1-16 and as verse sixteen says: "These were the ones chosen from the congregation, the leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the divisions of Israel." The tabernacle and the holy objects were transported by the three Levitical families (cf. 3:1-4:49): the tabernacle by the Gershonites and Merarites; the holy objects by the Kohathites. The group of Israelites were well organized along the lines of a military group and traveled as such from place to place.

Let's take a look at each group and see what we can learn.

**Standard One (vv. 13-17).** This group was composed first of the tribe of Judah and led by Nahshon ben Ammadab. The tribe of Judah, descended from Judah the son of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 29:35), would eventually become the most prominent tribe among the Israelites and occupied the region in southern Palestine containing Jerusalem. Their leader, Nahshon, is mentioned five times in the OT: Ex. 6:23; Num. 1:7, 2:3, 7:12, 10:14. But no details about him are provided, other than that he was the leader of the tribe of Judah during the exodus.

The tribe of Issachar was next under the leadership of Nethanel ben Zuar. Issachar was one of six sons of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 35:23): Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Zebulun. This tribe would eventually become part of the northern Kingdom and was given the region southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Nethanel (five references to him in the Bible) is only mentioned in Numbers in his capacity as leader of the tribe of Issachar: 1:8, 2:5, 7:18, 23, 10:15.



The third tribe in the first group is Zebulun under the leadership of Eliab ben Helon. Zebulun was the sixth son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 35:23). The tribe that descended from him was given territory to the northwest of that of Issachar and to the west of the Sea of Galilee in northern Palestine. One interesting aspect about this tribe is the later prophecy by Isaiah for a glorious future for Zebulun (Isa. 9:1-2) which Mt. 4:13-16 connects to Jesus' Galilean ministry. This group was led by Eliab ben Helon. Eliab is mentioned only five times and only in Numbers 1:9, 2:7, 7:24, 7:29, 10:16 as the leader of the tribe of Zebulun. More infamous, however, were his sons, especially Dathan and Abiram, (Num. 16:12, 26:9; Deut. 11:6) who are remembered only for their participation in a rebellion against Moses during the exodus.

These three tribes thus formed the leadership group that marched at the head of the procession of Israelites. According to Num. 2:9, these three tribes numbered 186,400 individuals.

Following behind them was the dismantled tabernacle under the care of two families of Levites, the Gershonites and the Merarites. The Levitical clan of Gershon was given the responsibility of superintending the tabernacle (3:25-26) and numbered some 7,500 males under the leadership of Eliasaph ben Lael. They camped on the west side of the tabernacle when it was set up (Num. 3:23), on the opposite side from the above three tribes. This group is portrayed favorably in the seventeen references found in the OT: Num. 3:21, 23, 24; 4:22, 24, 27, 28, 38, 41; 7:7; 10:17; 26:57; Josh. 21:6, 27; 1 Chr. 26:21; 2 Chr. 29:12. At the division of the promised land under Joshua the clan was given thirteen cities in northern Palestine.

The Merarites worked with the Gershonites in taking care of the tabernacle and are mentioned favorably some ten times in the OT: Num. 4:29, 33, 42, 45; 7:8; 10:17; 26:57; Josh. 21:7; 1 Chron. 6:63, 77. They numbered some 6,200 males according to Num. 3:34 and were led by Zuriel (3:35). They camped on the north side of the tabernacle when set up (3:35) and their responsibilities are outlined in 3:36-37. At the division of the promised land they received ten cities to occupy, also in northern Palestine.

**Standard Two (vv. 18-21).** Marching behind the tabernacle was the second group led by the tribe of Reuben, which in turn was led by Elizur ben Shedeur. Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 35:23). This tribe camped on the south side of the tabernacle when it was set up (cf. Num. 2:10) along with the other two tribes in this group and according to Num. 2:16, some 46,500 Reubenites marched in the group. This tribe was one of two tribes assigned land east of the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea. Elizur is mentioned five times (Num. 1:5; 2:10; 7:30, 35; 10:18) only in his capacity as the leader of the tribe.

The tribe of Simeon was the second tribe in this group. Simeon was another son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 35:23). In the first census, taken at Sinai, this tribe numbered some 59,300 according to Num. 1:23. This tribe received a large chunk of desert land south of that of Judah in southern Palestine later on. In typical fashion, Shelumiel, the leader of this tribe, is only mentioned in his role as leader in Numbers 1:6; 2:12; 7:36, 41; 10:19.

The third tribe in this group was Gad. Gad, along with Asher, were born to Jacob and Leah's slave girl, Zilpah (Gen. 30:11, 35:26). At the first census this tribe numbered some 45,650 men (Num. 1:25). The tribe of Gad settled the region east of the Jordan River and north of the Reubenites. Elisaph ben Deuel (sometimes spelled Reuel) was their leader. He is mentioned five times in Num. 1:14; 2:14; 7:42, 47; 10:20 only in his role as tribal leader. He is not to be confused with another Elisaph, who was the son of Lael and leader of the Gershonites. Some 45,650 individuals were counted in the first census as belonging to this tribe (Num. 1:25).

The total number of these three tribes who marched was 151,450 (Num. 2:16).

Behind these three tribes marched the Levitical clan of the Kohathites (Num. 3:27-32) who were in charge of the holy objects used for worship in the tabernacle and numbered some 8,600 males. They camped on the south side of the erected tabernacle and were led by Elizapah ben Uzziel.

**Standard Three (vv. 22-24).** The third group was led by the tribe of Ephraim under the guidance of Elishama ben Ammihud. Ephraim was the second of two sons of the patriarch Joseph (Gen. 41:52; 46:20) and Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. This tribe numbered some 40,500 males (Num. 1:33), and camped on the west side of the tabernacle. Elishama is also only mentioned five times in Numbers as the leader of this tribe: 1:10; 2:18; 7:48, 53; 10:22. In the later division of the promised land, this tribe received territory to the north of that of Judah in what became a part of the southern kingdom after Solomon.

The next tribe in this group was that of Manasseh under the leadership of Gamaliel ben Pedahzug. Manasseh was the brother of Ephraim and son of Joseph and Asenath (Gen. 41:51; 46:20). The tribe numbered some 32,200 males (Num. 1:35). This tribe also camped on the west side of the tabernacle. They would receive land in the far northeastern part of Palestine east of the Sea of Galilee and north of Gad. Gamaliel is mentioned five times in Numbers (1:10; 2:20; 7:54, 59; 10:23) only in his leadership role. Many centuries later a Jewish rabbi named after him would play an important role in early Christianity, first as Paul's teacher during his Pharisee days (Acts 22:3) and as a wise advisor of the Sanhedrin cautioning them to act wisely against Peter and John (Acts 5:34).

The last tribe in this group was Benjamin. Benjamin was the younger son of Jacob and Rachel, whose brother was Joseph (Gen. 35:24). His mother, Rachel, died at his birth (Gen. 35:18). Some 35,400 males were counted in this tribe at the census at Sinai (Num. 1:36-37), and they also camped on the west side of the tabernacle. Abidan is mentioned only five times in Numbers (1:11; 2:22; 7:60; 7:65; 10:24) only in his role as tribal leader.

The total number of males in this group was counted at 108,100 individuals (Num. 2:24).

**Standard Four (vv. 25-27).** This group led by the tribe of Dan acted as the rear guard of the marching Israelites. They camped on the north side of the tabernacle and numbered some 62,700 males (Num. 2:25-26). Both Dan and Naphtali were born to Jacob and Bilhah, one of Rachel's slave girls (Gen. 35:25). At the division of land under Joshua this tribe received land to the northwest of Judah and to the west of Ephraim. Later a part of this tribe would migrate to the extreme northern part of Palestine and settle there. Ahiezer receives the customary five mentions as tribal leader in Num. 1:12; 2:25; 7:66; 7:71; 10:25.

The second tribe in this group was Asher under the leadership of Pagiel ben Ochran (Num. 2:27-28). The group numbered some 41,500 males and also camped on the north side of the tabernacle. Asher along with Gad were born to Jacob and to Zilpah, one of Leah's slave girls (Gen. 35:26). Pagiel typically receives mention five times as tribal leader in Num. 1:13; 2:27; 7:72, 77; 10:26. This tribe received land in the northwestern coastal section of Palestine where the city of Tyre was located.

The final tribal listing is that of Naphtali under the leadership of Ahira ben Enan (Num. 2:29-30). Numbering some 53,400 males, they also camped on the north side of the tabernacle. Their land allotment later would also be in the far northern part of Palestine between that of Asher on the west and Manasseh on the east. The customary five listings of Ahira as tribal leader are found in Num. 1:15; 2:29; 7:78, 83; 10:27.

This fourth group numbered some 157,600 males according to Num. 2:31 and the total number of the tribal groups was listed at 603,550 males in Num. 2:32. Each time they broke camp, they lined up as described above; each time they set up camp they were positioned on the above described sides of the tabernacle with it in the center of the camp (Num. 2:34).

This listing of tribes and Levitical clans provides interesting details of Israelite history. What lessons can be gleaned from this? One significant impression that struck me is the importance of being organized in order to get things done. With this large number of people to manage Moses had to set up structure and provide guidelines for how that structure was to function. Quite insightful is the background of how the structure was formed. It wasn't done arbitrarily. Instead, it was based on history and tribal/clannish loyalties, thus taking on a natural pattern. The church leader of today would be very wise to consider such background aspects when setting about to create organizational structure in today's congregation. If the structure emerges out of natural patterns, rather than arbitrary decision, the structure will last and work better. This would apply equally to any type of organization, whether or not connected to church life.

To be sure, a caution needs to be injected here. Organization is not to take the place of God's leadership nor of his presence. This is perhaps the greatest mistake Southern Baptists have often made over the past half a century. Yet, disorganization is an equally great danger. When functioning properly, being organized and depending on God's powerful presence to lead can result in significant advancement of His work in this world.

Thus from this passage at least two important spiritual principles come to mind: following God's leadership and getting organized to do God's work.

## Time Indicators (NRSV):

Num. 1:1

The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, **on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt**, saying: **2** Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, **Date = Iyyar [Ziv] 1 (middle of April)**

Num. 1:18

**17** Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by name, **18** and **on the first day of the second month** they assembled the whole congregation together. They registered themselves in their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of names from twenty years old and upward, individually, **19** as the Lord commanded Moses. **Date = Iyyar [Ziv] 1 (middle of April)**

Num. 9:1-5

**1** The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, **in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt**, saying: **2** Let the Israelites keep the passover at its appointed time. **3 On the fourteenth day of this month**, at twilight, <sup>E28</sup> you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its regulations you shall keep it. **4** So Moses told the Israelites that they should keep the passover. **5** They kept the passover **in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight**, <sup>E29</sup> in the wilderness of Sinai. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so the Israelites did. **Date = Iyyar [Ziv] 1, 14 (middle to end of April)**

Num. 9:11

**9** The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: **10** Speak to the Israelites, saying: Anyone of you or your descendants who is unclean through touching a corpse, or is away on a journey, shall still keep the passover to the Lord. **11 In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight**, <sup>E30</sup> they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. **Date = Iyyar [Ziv] 14 (end of April)**

Num. 10:11

**11 In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month**, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. <sup>E33</sup> **Date = Iyyar [Ziv] 20 (early to middle May)**

Num. 20:1

**1** The Israelites, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin **in the first month**, and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there. **Date = Nisan (Abib)**

Num. 33:1-4

**1** These are the stages by which the Israelites went out of the land of Egypt in military formation under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. **2** Moses wrote down their starting points, stage by stage, by command of the Lord; and these are their stages according to their starting places. **3** They set out from Rameses **in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the passover** the Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, **4** while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them. The Lord executed judgments even against their gods. **Date = Iyyar 15 (end of April)**

Deut. 1:1-5

**1** These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness, on the plain opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab. **2** (By the way of Mount Seir it takes eleven days to reach Kadesh-barnea from Horeb.) **3 In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month**, Moses spoke to the Israelites just as the Lord had commanded him to speak to them. **4** This was after he had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and <sup>E1</sup> in Edrei. **5** Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law as follows: **Date = Shebat 1 (middle of January)**

Nancy L. de Claisé-Walford, "Year," Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible.



“Year. The basic unit of the calendar for the ancient Israelites and other ancient Near Eastern peoples. It was based on the annual cycle of the movement of the sun, moon, and stars, and on the cycle of planting and harvesting crops. The OT does not contain a full calendar for ancient Israel, so one must be constructed from the references in various passages to days, dates, months, seasons, and years.

The OT is unclear about whether the ancient Israelite year began in the spring or in the fall. Exod. 23:16; 34:22 state that the fall festival, the Feast of the Ingathering, is to be celebrated at ‘the end of the year’ (23:16) or ‘the turn of the year’ (34:22). Lev. 23:5; Num 28:16 assert, however, that the Passover, the major spring festival, is to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Gezer Calendar (ca. 925 B.C.E.) indicates that the year began in the autumn. The autumn may have marked the end/beginning of the agricultural calendar, while the spring marked the commencement of the cultic calendar. Regardless of when the year began, the month names, borrowed from the Babylonian, were fixed:

<b>Hebrew</b>	<b>Babylonian</b>	<b>Equivalent</b>
Nisan (Abib)	Nisanu	Mar./Apr.
Iyyar	Ayaru	Apr./May
Sivan	Siwanu/Simanu	May/June
Tammuz	Du’uzu	June/July
Ab	Abu	July/Aug.
Elul	Elulu/Ululu	Aug./Sept.
Tishri	Tisritu	Sept./Oct.
(Mar)hesvan	(W)arah-sammu	Oct./Nov.
Kislev	Kisliwu/Kislimu	Nov./Dec.
Tebet	Tebitu	Dec./Jan.
Shebat	Sabatu	Jan./Feb.
Adar	Addaru	Feb./Mar.

In the Bible, only four month-names are given: the spring months of Abib (Nisan) and Ziv (Iyyar) and the fall months of Ethanim (Tishri) and Bul (Marhesvan). These were the most important months of the year, since significant events in the agricultural life of Palestine and the solar equinoxes occurred in them.”