

Author - STEVEN R. DOUGLAS 2017

# THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

**OLD TESTAMENT**

**BOOK 4**

**NUMBERS**



**Rebellion Against The Laws Of Moses, by Botticelli**

## SUMMARY

God orders Moses, in the wilderness of Sinai, to number those able to bear arms—of all the men "from twenty years old and upward," and to appoint princes over each tribe. A total of 603,550 Israelites are found to be fit for military service. The tribe of Levi is exempted from military service and therefore not included in the census.

Moses consecrates the Levites for the service of the Tabernacle in the place of the first-born sons, who hitherto had performed that service. The Levites are divided into three families, the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites, each under a chief. The Kohathites were headed by Eleazar, son of Aaron, while the Gershonites and Merarites were headed by Aaron's other son, Ithamar. Preparations are then made for resuming the march to the Promised Land. Various ordinances and laws are decreed.

The Israelites set out from Sinai. The people murmur against God and are punished by fire; Moses complains of their stubbornness and is ordered to choose seventy elders to assist him in the government of the people. Miriam and Aaron insult Moses at Hazeroth, which angers God; Miriam is punished with leprosy and is shut out of camp for seven days, at the end of which the Israelites proceed to the desert of Paran on the border of Canaan.

Twelve spies are sent out into Canaan and come back to report to Moses. Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, report that the land is abundant and is "flowing with milk and honey", but the other spies say that it is inhabited by giants, and the Israelites refuse to enter the land. Yahweh decrees that the Israelites will be punished for their loss of faith by having to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Moses is ordered by God to make plates to cover the altar. The children of Israel murmur against Moses and Aaron on account of the destruction of Korah's men and are stricken with the plague, with 14,700 perishing. Aaron and his family are declared by God to be responsible for any iniquity committed in connection with the sanctuary. The Levites are again appointed to help in the keeping of the Tabernacle. The Levites are ordered to surrender to the priests a part of the tithes taken to them.

Miriam dies at Kadesh Barnea and the Israelites set out for Moab, on Canaan's eastern border. The Israelites blame Moses for the lack of water. Moses is ordered by God to speak to a rock but disobeys, and is punished by the announcement that he shall not enter Canaan. The king of Edom refuses permission to pass through his land and they go around it. Aaron dies on Mount Hor. The Israelites are bitten by fiery flying serpents for speaking against God and Moses. A brazen serpent is made to ward off these serpents.

The Israelites arrive on the plains of Moab. A new census gives the total number of males from twenty years and upward as 601,730, and the number of the Levites from the age of one month and upward as 23,000. The land shall be divided by lot. The daughters of Zelophehad, their father having no sons, are to share in the allotment.

Moses is ordered to appoint Joshua as his successor. Prescriptions for the observance of the feasts and the offerings for different occasions are enumerated. Moses orders the Israelites to massacre the people of Midian. The Reubenites and the Gadites request Moses to assign them the land east of the Jordan. Moses grants their request after they promise to help in the conquest of the land west of the Jordan.

## SUMMARY Continued

The land east of the Jordan is divided among the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Moses recalls the stations at which the Israelites halted during their forty years' wanderings and instructs the Israelites to exterminate the Canaanites and destroy their idols. The boundaries of the land are spelled out; the land is to be divided under the supervision of Eleazar, Joshua, and twelve princes, one of each tribe.

## NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 6:24** *The Lord bless you and keep you;*
- 6:25** *The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;*
- 6:26** *The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.*
- 11:1** Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.
- 12:5** Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.
- 12:6** Then He said, *Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.*
- 12:7** *Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house.*
- 12:8** *I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?*
- 12:10** And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.
- 13:33** There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.
- 14:11** Then the Lord said to Moses: *How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?*
- 14:12** *I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.*
- 14:23** *they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.*
- 14:24** *But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.*
- 14:35** *I the Lord have spoken this; I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.*
- 14:38** *But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.*
- 22:28** Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"



## CHARACTER Definitions

**LEVITES** - The Levitical priesthood began with Aaron, the older brother of Moses. Aaron's descendants served as the priests in Israel, ministering in the tabernacle and, later, the temple, primarily as mediators between man and God. The Levitical priests bore the responsibility of offering the sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law. Some of the Levitical priests in the Bible are Ezra; Eli; and Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

The term Levitical is derived from the Israelite tribe of Levi. Levi was the third son of Leah and Jacob and the father of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron. Originally, it was the firstborn son of every family who was consecrated to God and inherited the birthright, leadership, authority, etc.

We see this institution of "first" things being what God requires as far back as Genesis 4:4 when God was pleased with the firstborn of Abel's flock that he offered to God is firstborn son, and each individual Israelite was called to be holy, priestly, and royal. And then out of the nation of Israel God chose the tribe of Levi to serve Him and the sons of Aaron to be the priests. Thus, all priests were Levites, but not every Levite was a priest.

Jacob's prophecy that Levi's descendants would be scattered throughout Israel was fulfilled when God appointed them as the priestly tribe who, unlike the other tribes, would receive no land inheritance. However, in God's sovereign and mysterious way, Jacob's prophecy turned into a blessing because Levi's inheritance was better than land—it was God Himself. And God promised to provide for the Levites from the abundance of all of the other tribes.

The Levites who were not priests were given various duties in the caretaking of the tabernacle and its furnishings. The priests among the Levites were given the immeasurable privilege of doing service in the tabernacle. The Levitical priests also served as judges and teachers of God's law.

**CALEB** - The story of Caleb, a faithful man of God, begins in the book of Numbers. After being delivered from bondage in Egypt, the Israelites were led by God to the border of the land of Canaan, a land "flowing with milk and honey" that God had promised they would inherit.

Moses had chosen twelve men, one from each tribe, to scout the land before entering. Among them was Caleb, representing the tribe of Judah. The twelve men spied out the land for forty days and then came back to Moses. They reported that the land was indeed fruitful but its inhabitants were the mighty descendants of Anak. Terrified by the size and strength of the Canaanites, ten of the spies warned Moses not to enter Canaan.

Caleb silenced the murmuring, fearful men by saying, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it". Caleb took his stand because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Caleb knew of the promises of God to the Israelites, and, despite the evidence of his own eyes regarding the obstacles, he had faith that God would give them victory over the Canaanites.

## CHARACTERS Continued

Unfortunately, the people of Israel ignored Caleb and listened to the report of the other spies. They were so frightened that they wept all night and even wished they had died at the hands of their slave masters in Egypt. They turned on Caleb and Joshua (the spy from Ephraim) and wanted to stone them on the spot.

God was exceedingly angry with the people and threatened to destroy them until Moses interceded for them. God relented, but He decreed that the people would wander in the wilderness until all of that faithless generation had died. But God said that “my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly” and gave him the promise that he would own all the land he had seen as a spy.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until all of that generation, except Joshua and Caleb, died. After the forty years of wandering and five more years of war within Canaan, Caleb was 85 years old; yet he was as strong as ever and able to fight the same Anakites that had frightened his countrymen. His confidence was born out of his absolute faith in the promises of God.

Caleb’s territory in Canaan included “Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, the sons of Anak. From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher)”.

Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, captured Kiriath Sepher and was given Caleb’s daughter Aksah to wed. Later, Aksah asked her father to include some springs of water as part of her inheritance, and Caleb gave them to her. Later still, Othniel, Caleb’s son-in-law, became Israel’s first judge.

From the accounts of the life of Caleb, we see a faithful man who trusted God to fulfill His promises when others allowed their fears to override their small faith. Even into his later years, Caleb remained steadfast in his faith. God blessed Caleb for his faithfulness and patience, an encouragement to us to believe God. Like Caleb, we should be prepared to follow God in every circumstance, patiently waiting for Him to fulfill His promises and ready to take action when the time is right.

**MIRIAM** - Miriam in the Bible is Moses’ older sister. She is called “Miriam the prophetess”. She plays an important role in several episodes of Moses’ life and in the exodus of Israel from Egypt. Miriam is most likely the sister who watches over her baby brother Moses among the bulrushes on the banks of the Nile. Their mother had hidden Moses in a basket on the river bank to protect him from Pharaoh’s decree to throw all Hebrew baby boys into the river.

As Miriam watches, Pharaoh’s daughter discovers and pities Moses, and Miriam quickly intervenes to ask if the Egyptian princess would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for her. The princess agrees, and Miriam quickly gets their mother.

Pharaoh’s daughter commands Moses’ biological mother to nurse him and bring him back to her when he is older. By the grace of God, Miriam helps save the infant Moses.

Miriam had another brother, Aaron. Their parents, Amram and Jochebed, were both from the Levite tribe of Israel. Together, God uses Moses, Miriam, and Aaron to lead the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan.

## CHARACTERS Continued

After miraculously crossing the Red Sea on dry ground and seeing the Egyptian army overthrown in the sea, Miriam leads the women with a tambourine in worshipping God with song and dance. She is given the title “prophetess,” the first of only a handful of women in Scripture identified that way. Others called a “prophetess” are Deborah, Huldah, Isaiah’s wife, Anna, and Philip’s four daughters.

Unfortunately, Miriam later falls into a spirit of complaining. Both Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses for marrying a Cushite or Ethiopian woman, but Miriam is listed first so it is likely she instigated the complaint.

While the complaint was ostensibly against Moses’ wife, the discontent ran deeper: “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’”. In her criticism, Miriam was questioning the Lord’s wisdom in choosing Moses as the leader.

God was angry that Miriam and Aaron were so willing to speak against the servant He had chosen. The Lord struck Miriam with leprosy. Aaron, realizing the foolishness of their words, repented of his sin, and Moses, ever the intercessor, prayed on behalf of his sister: “Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘Please, God, heal her!’”. After a week-long quarantine, Miriam was healed and rejoined the camp.

As Miriam’s leprosy convicted Aaron of the foolish words they had spoken against God’s chosen servant, it should also remind us not to judge those around us or live in jealousy when God has given a specific call to someone else. Miriam had an opportunity to show the people of Israel what it meant to live in love as a servant of God without complaining, and, for most of her life, she did; but she failed in the matter of Moses’ wife.

Our next encounter with Miriam is at the end of the 40-year desert wandering. Because of their grumbling and lack of faith in God, the first generation of Israelites to leave captivity was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. This included the prophetess Miriam.

Most of the older generation had already died in the wilderness when Israel comes back to Kadesh, where they had started their wanderings. It’s here that Miriam dies and is buried. Hers was a life of responsibility and service, of God’s calling and providence, yet it also reminds us that no one is too important to receive God’s discipline for personal sin.

**TABERNACLE** - The tabernacle of Moses was the temporary place of worship that the Israelites built according to God’s specifications while wandering the desert and used until King Solomon built a temple. The word tabernacle is a translation of the Hebrew mishkan, which means “dwelling-place.” The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates this time of wandering before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan.

The overall shape of the tabernacle of Moses followed traditional structures of the time. It consisted of an outer court, approximately seventy-five feet wide by one hundred and fifty feet long, with a fifteen-foot by forty-five-foot structure in the back.

## CHARACTERS Continued

The court walls consisted of linen curtains attached by bronze hooks to a series of pillars. The pillars were supported on the bottom by bronze sockets and possibly held in place with rope that attached to bronze rings. The gate, always facing east, was about thirty feet of blue, purple, and scarlet woven into a curtain of linen. The altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver that the priests purified themselves in sat in the courtyard.

The tent was divided into two rooms: the Holy Place, where the table of showbread, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense sat; and the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. The rooms were separated by a veil, similar to the entry screen, embroidered with cherubim and hung from four gold-covered acacia posts by gold clasps. Although the tabernacle was heavy and had many parts, it was surprisingly portable. Priests carried the Ark and the altars on their shoulders, but the rest fit in ox-drawn carts.

The purpose of the tabernacle of Moses was to provide a place where the people could properly worship God. Priests sacrificed animals on the altar in the outer court. The bread of the presence, the continually burning lampstand, and the offering of incense were all in the Holy Place.

And once a year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies as part of the ceremony of the Day of Atonement. At no other time was anyone to enter the Holy of Holies, as the presence of God dwelt with the Ark of the Covenant.

**KORAH** - Korah, one of the rich leaders of the Levites, and a cousin of Moses and Aaron, felt that he had been slighted and overlooked in the distribution of the highest priestly honors and leadership. He envied Moses and Aaron, and also his cousin Elzaphan, who had been put in charge of the Levites, after Aaron's family had become elevated to the rank of Kohanim (Priests).

Realizing that despite his riches and influence he alone could do very little to shake the people's faith and confidence in Moses and Aaron, Korah looked for associates in his campaign against them. Korah went to the people of the tribe of Reuben, his neighbors in the camping order. Being daily in close contact with them, Korah easily swayed the opinions of their leaders and drew them into his conspiracy.

Amongst the Reubenites were two men, Dathan and Abiram. They were the first to rally to the party of Korah, and they were his most eager agents among their tribesmen. Their experienced and clever campaigning, aided by Korah's riches, influence, and knowledge, induced as many as 250 respected leaders of the Jewish camp to join the rebellion.

They now felt bold enough to go out into the open and speak up against Moses' leadership of the people. Adopting the mantle of piety and justice, and pretending to be a champion of his people, Korah accused Moses and Aaron of imposing their leadership upon the community.

"You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" said Korah and his men to Moses and Aaron.

## CHARACTERS Continued

When Moses heard of the public accusations made against him by members of the tribe of Levi and their associates, he prayed to God for guidance in his new tribulation. Then he addressed himself to Korah and his party, and told them to prepare themselves for the next day, when God would show whom He considered worthy to serve Him as priests.

All the contestants were to take censers and offer incense before God. God would then show whether He approved of this act. Moses spoke to Korah privately and warned him against his lust for personal honor.

"Is it not enough that the God of Israel has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them?" Moses said. But his words fell on deaf ears.

After his unsuccessful talk with Korah, Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, ringleaders of the rebellion among the non-Levites. However, they replied with their usual arrogance: ""We will not go up. Is it not enough that you have brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you should also exercise authority over us? "

Moses was deeply hurt by this venomous attack upon his leadership, and he prayed to God to expose the wickedness of these people before the entire congregation of Israel.

The next morning Korah's associates appeared before the Tabernacle with censers, as Moses had told them to do. With them came the entire community whom Korah had called to witness the proceedings. Then God told Moses to order the children of Israel to separate themselves from Korah and his associates, and everything that belonged to them, for fear that they share the rebels' fate.

Again Moses and the Elders approached Dathan and Abiram in a last minute effort to induce them to repent of their sin. However, it was in vain, and Moses ordered the rest of the people to depart from the tents of Dathan and Abiram. The people obeyed. Dathan and Abiram and their families stood in front of their tents, and in a defiant mood continued to abuse Moses.

Gravely, Moses told the children of Israel: "With this you shall know that the Lord sent me to do all these deeds, for I did not devise them myself. If these men die as all men die and the fate of all men will be visited upon them, then the Lord has not sent me.

But if the Lord creates a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they descend alive into the grave, you will know that these men have provoked the Lord."

Hardly had Moses finished speaking, when the earth cleft asunder, and swallowed Korah and his associates with their families and belongings. They were buried alive and perished by a terrible death that made the people who stood nearby flee in terror. The next instant a fire from heaven devoured the 250 men who had dared to contest Aaron's priestly authority by offering incense.



## CHARACTERS Continued

**BALAAM** - Balaam was a wicked prophet in the Bible and is noteworthy because, although he was a wicked prophet, he was not a false prophet. That is, Balaam did hear from God, and God did give him some true prophecies to speak.

However, Balaam's heart was not right with God, and eventually he showed his true colors by betraying Israel and leading them astray.

In Numbers we find the story about Balaam and the king of Moab, a man called Balak. King Balak wanted to weaken the children of Israel, who on their way to Canaan had moved in on his territory. Balak sent to Balaam, who lived in Mesopotamia along the Euphrates River, and asked him to curse Israel in exchange for a reward.

Balaam was apparently willing to do this but said he needed God's permission. Balaam, of course, had no power, in himself, to curse Israel, but, if God were willing to curse Israel, Balaam would be rewarded through Balak. God told Balaam, "You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed". King Balak then sent "other officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first", promising a handsome reward. This time God said, "Go with them, but do only what I tell you".

The next morning, Balaam saddled his donkey and left for Moab. God sent an angel to oppose Balaam on the way. The donkey Balaam was riding could see the angel, but Balaam could not, and when the donkey three times moved to avoid the angel, Balaam was angry and beat the animal.

"Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth", and it rebuked the prophet for the beatings. "Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn".

The angel told Balaam that he certainly would have killed Balaam had not the donkey spared his life. Ironically, a dumb beast had more wisdom than God's prophet. The angel then repeated to Balaam the instruction that he was only to speak what God told him to speak concerning the Hebrews.

In Moab, King Balak took the prophet Balaam up to a high place called Bamoth Baal and told him to curse the Israelites. Balaam first offered fourteen sacrifices on seven altars and met with the Lord. He then declared the message God gave him: a blessing on Israel: "How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?".

King Balak was upset that Balaam had pronounced a blessing on Israel rather than a curse, but he had him try again, this time from the top of Pisgah. Balaam sacrificed another fourteen animals and met with the Lord. When he faced Israel, Balaam again spoke a blessing: "I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it".

King Balak told Balaam that, if he was going to keep blessing Israel, it was better for him to just shut up. But the king decided to try one more time, taking Balaam to the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland. Again, Balaam offered fourteen animals on seven newly built altars.

## CHARACTERS Continued

Then “the Spirit of God came on him and he spoke his message”. The third message was not what the Moabite king wanted to hear: “How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel!”.

Balaam’s three prophecies of blessing on Israel infuriated the king of Moab, who told the prophet to go back home with no reward: “Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the Lord has kept you from being rewarded”.

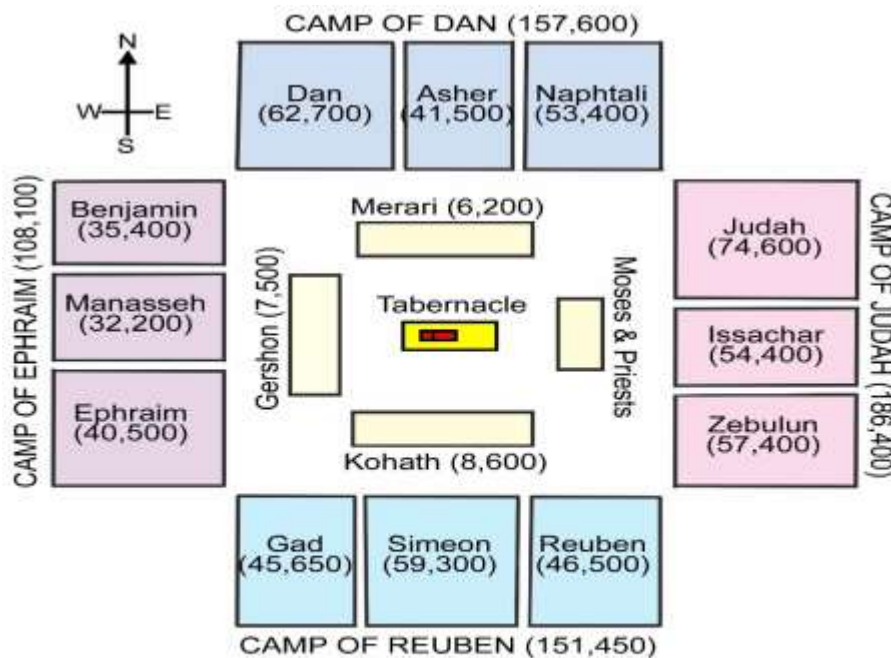
Before he left, Balaam reminded the king that he had said from the very beginning he could only say what God told him to say. Then he gave the king four more prophecies, gratis. In the fourth prophecy, Balaam foretold of the Messiah: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth”.

Balaam’s seven prophecies were seven blessings on God’s people; it was God’s enemies who were cursed.

However, later on Balaam figured out a way to get his reward from Balak. Balaam advised the Moabites on how to entice the people of Israel with prostitutes and idolatry. He could not curse Israel directly, so he came up with a plan for Israel to bring a curse upon themselves.

Balak followed Balaam’s advice, and Israel fell into sin, worshiping Baal of Peor and committing fornication with Midianite women. For this God plagued them, and 24,000 men died.



Arrangement of the Camp of Israel  
Numbers 2:1-3:39

## BIBLE TIMELINE

1445 BC	Census, Tribes, Duties	Numbers 1 - 6
1445 BC	Tabernacle Dedication	Numbers 7 - 10
1445 BC	The People Complain	Numbers 11, 12
1445 BC	The Twelve Spies	Numbers 13
1445 BC	People Murmur at the Spies' Report	Numbers 14, 15
1426 BC	Korah's Rebellion	Numbers 16
1426 BC	Aaron's Staff Buds	Numbers 17
1426 BC	Priests, Red Heifer, Cleansing	Numbers 18, 19
1407 BC	Aaron's Death	Numbers 20:22
1407 BC	The Bronze Snake	Numbers 21
1407 BC	Balaam and the Angel	Numbers 22 - 25
1407 BC	The Second Census	Numbers 26
1407 BC	Joshua Chosen to Succeed Moses	Numbers 27:18
1407 BC	Special sacrifices and holy days	Numbers 28, 29
1407 BC	Vows of women	Numbers 30
1407 BC	Conquest of Midian	Numbers 31
1407 BC	Division of Transjordan	Numbers 32
1407 BC	Summary of Israel's Journey	Numbers 33
1407 BC	Apportionment of Canaan	Numbers 34
1407 BC	Borders and Cities of Refuge	Numbers 35
1407 BC	Zelophehad's Daughters Marry	Numbers 36





