EXPOSITION OF NUMBERS

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by

Jason Coke

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Canonical Context

All 66 inspired books of the Protestant canon relate to the progressively revealed Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible, but not in the same way. Each book either *carries* the metanarrative,[1] *contributes* to it but does not carry it,[2] or *contemplates* the metanarrative.[3] A book's placement into one of these three categories does not necessarily depend on genre, even though a correlation frequently exists. Rather, a book's categorization depends on its contents and its relationship to other books.[4]

In the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of Scripture, the following compose the major elements of the story:

Table 1: Elements of the Metanarrative of Scripture

Setting:	Heaven and earth	Gen 1–2
Hero:	God the Father	Gen 1–2
Hero's desire:	Image bearers to rule the earth	Gen 1:26–28
Problem:	Image bearers gave their rule to the serpent	Gen 3
Solution (the plot):	Promise seed will strike the serpent and restore rule to image bearers	Gen 3:15–Rev 19
Turning point:	The Cross	Gospels
Climax:	The Great Tribulation	Rev 6–19
Resolution / denouement:	Image bearers again rule the earth	Rev 20–22

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[1] The carrier category refers to biblical books that carry the primary plotline of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Many books of historical narrative and certain parts of prophetic books fall into this category because they carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative. Such books describe the outworking of the promise in Genesis 3:15–16.

[2] The contributor category refers to biblical books that contribute to, but do not carry, the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Most prophetic books and certain parts of the NT epistles fall into this category because while they do not carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative, they contribute important (often prophetic) information about that metanarrative. Additionally, certain historical narratives run in parallel to one another (e.g., Kings and Chronicles, the four Gospels). In these cases, 1–2 Kings function as the carrier and 1–2 Chronicles as the contributor. Among the Gospels, Matthew functions as the carrier and the other three as contributors.

[3] The contemplator category refers to biblical books that neither carry nor contribute to the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Rather, these books reflect upon (contemplate) the realities of that narrative. Books of wisdom, poetry, and most NT epistles fall into this category, because in light of the Genesis 3:15 promised seed having come, they address how the people of God should live until he returns to establish his kingdom.

[4] For this reason, certain biblical books fit into more than one of these three categories.

As shown in Table 1, the Bible as a whole presents God as the hero of the story who desires his image bearers to rule the world on his behalf. This metanarrative begins in the book of Genesis and concludes in the book of Revelation. Genesis presents the setting,[5] the characters,[6] the plot problem,[7] and the beginning of the rising action. The problem identified in Genesis 3 did not change God's desire for his image bearers to rule the world. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15–16 indicates a war between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. This battle is the central conflict in the entire biblical narrative; a conflict not resolved until Revelation 20. In this prophecy, God promised the seed of the woman—a man—would defeat the serpent, restore humanity to the garden, and restore rule of the earth to God's image bearers. The anticipation of this promised seed drives the plot of the biblical narrative. The entire plot of the metanarrative thus revolves around how Genesis 3:15–16 comes to fruition. This prophecy reaches the first phase of its fulfillment in Revelation 20 in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, and its final phase of fulfillment in Revelation 21–22 in the new heaven and earth.

In narrative (or a metanarrative such as the whole Bible), "The story is the meaning."[8] Every book must be interpreted in light of the plot problem, rising action, and resolution. Recent decades have seen advances in narrative criticism applied to biblical texts which have brought to light the complexity and skillful crafting of biblical narratives. Such complexity is not merely limited to individual biblical books. As one scholar noted, "Narrative structure, usually interconnected to plot or characterization, may extend across several books, supporting the evangelical concept that the divine author provides unity and continuity in the biblical story."[9] Thus, even though this paper will argue for Mosaic human authorship, it recognizes the place of Exodus in light of the divine author's total metanarrative. Indeed, "The Bible's total story sketches in narrative form the meaning of all reality."[10]

The book of Genesis traces the line of promise from Adam to Noah to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Perez. God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 15) and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob highlighted their role to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12). In the covenant ceremony, God also told Abraham, "You must surely know that your descendants shall be as aliens in a land not their own. And they shall serve them and they shall oppress them four hundred years. And also the nation that they serve I will judge. Then afterward they shall go out with great possessions … And the fourth generation shall return here [Canaan]" (Gen 15:13–14, 16)."[11] That prophetic statement provides a basic outline for the books of Exodus through Joshua. The concluding chapters of Genesis explain how the family of Jacob / Israel came to live in

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[5] Heaven and earth, Genesis 1–2.

[6] God, the hero of the story; mankind, the object of God's desire; and the antagonist, the serpent.

[7] Despite God's desire for mankind to rule the earth on his behalf, the man and woman gave their rule over to the serpent (Gen 3).

[8] Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 88.

[9] J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *BSac* 166 (2009): 8.

[10] Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 64.

[11] Unless otherwise stated, all English Bible quotations come from the Lexham English Bible (LEB).

Egypt, and the book of Exodus picks up from that point and describes the outworking of that prophetic statement in Israel's sojourning, oppression, going out from that foreign nation with great possessions, and (the early stages of) returning to Canaan. Exodus also explains various important aspects of the metanarrative: (1) how a group of enslaved tribesmen became a unified nation, (2) the foundational place of Moses in delivering the Law of Yahweh, (3) Israel's place as Yahweh's treasured possession (סְגֻלָּה), (4) the nation's place as a kingdom of priests among all the Gentile nations (Exod 19:5–6), and (5) the covenant relationship between Yahweh and national Israel (Exod 19–24).

   Exodus therefore *carries* the narrative begun in Genesis, but does not conclude it. Indeed, at the close of Exodus, the Israelites had still not reached the Promised Land. The books of the Pentateuch (and beyond) form a unified narrative. Genesis depends on further books to continue carrying the metanarrative, just as much as the latter books depend on the former. Jesus called the Pentateuch "the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). These five books, then, form one successive narrative: the conclusion of Genesis portrays the blessing of Yahweh on the sons of Israel as they settle in Egypt, and Exodus begins in Egypt with the family growing over numerous generations. Exodus concludes with the Israelites' tabernacle in the wilderness being filled with Yahweh's glory, while Leviticus and Numbers open with Yahweh speaking to Moses from that tabernacle. Numbers closes where Deuteronomy begins and ends, on the plains of Moab. Just as humanity was banished east of the garden (Gen 3), now the nation of promise camped on the eastern shore of the Jordan ready to head west into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy closes with the death of Moses, and Joshua begins, "After the death of Moses" (Josh 1:1) and recounts Israel's failed attempt to dispossess the Canaanites of the land, and closes with Joshua's death. Judges opens with, "After the death of Joshua" (Judg 1:1) and closes with the failure of the judges. 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings successively trace Israel's history as the priests, kings, and prophets fail to produce covenant faithfulness in the nation. Just as post-flood humanity had descended into rebellion at the tower of Babylon (Gen 11), now the chosen nation was exiled east into the new Babylon, echoing the exile east of the garden.[12] Thus, Genesis through Kings *carry* the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-rule metanarrative.

   While the Scriptures certainly have an overarching message based on the entire metanarrative, each book does indeed have a specific message and intended response for its original audience. For Numbers, with the chosen nation now out of Egypt (Exodus) and the Law delivered to that nation (Leviticus), Israel was now ready to proceed into the Promised Land. The book of Numbers describes that journey from Sinai to the Promised Land and functions as a *carrier* of the biblical metanarrative begun in Genesis. In Numbers, the narrative demonstration of rebellions gone wrong in the Exodus' first generation communicates for the second generation the importance of respecting the divinely ordained roles of leadership within Israel and the cost of deviating from them. The narrative points to Joshua as the successor of Moses and therefore the importance of following Joshua's leadership in possessing the land of Canaan. The various laws interposed in the narrative explained how the Israelites should live in covenant fidelity once in the Promised Land.

   The books of the Pentateuch—and beyond—form a unified metanarrative that will describe the outworking of the Genesis 3:15 promise. Numbers contributes to that metanarrative

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[12] Gary E. Schnittjer, *Torah Story: An Apprenticeship on the Pentateuch*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 38.

by describing the movement of the nation of promise from Sinai towards the Promised Land where they can function as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Glossary of Literary Terms and Devices[13]

Acrostic: A poem in which the successive units begin with the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Allegory: A work of literature in which some or all of the details have a corresponding other meaning and refer to either a concept or historical particular.

Alliteration: involves the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words in close proximity, used to create rhythm or emphasis.

Allusion: a reference to another work of literature, person, or event, often used to enhance meaning or provide deeper insight.

Ambiguity: the use of language that allows for multiple interpretations or meanings, adding complexity and depth to the narrative.

Anti-hero: a literary protagonist who exhibits an absence of the character traits that are conventionally associated with literary heroes.

Anti-romance: a work of literature, or part of a work of literature, that presents unideal experience; a literary world of total bondage and the absence of the ideal.

Anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, or behaviors to animals, inanimate objects, or deities.

Antagonist: the character or force that opposes the protagonist, thus creating conflict in the narrative.

Antithetic parallelism: a two-line poetic unit in which the second line states the truth of the first in the opposite way or introduces a contrast.

Aphorism: a short, memorable statement of truth.

Archetype: an image, plot motif, or character type that recurs throughout literature and is part of a reader's total literary experience.

Blazon: a love poem that praises the attractive features and / or virtues of the beloved by means of a catalogue or listing technique.

Calling stories: in the Gospels, stories in which Jesus calls a person to follow him or to respond to a command. Also called vocation stories.

Characterization: the process by which the author reveals the personality, traits, and attributes of a character or group of characters in a narrative.

Climax: the moment of peak tension / plot conflict in the story.

Climactic parallelism: a form of parallelism in which the first line is left incomplete until the second line repeats part of it and then makes it a whole statement by adding to it.

Comedy: a story with a U-shaped plot in which the action begins in prosperity, descends into potentially tragic events, and rises to a happy ending.

Conflict / plot tension: the central struggle or problem between opposing forces that drives the plot forward. This can be internal (within a character) or external (between characters or between

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[13] This list is a composite of terms from three sources: (1) Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 513–17, (2) Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 8–19, and (3) David R. Klingler, "Bible Exposition Template and Instructions," unpublished manuscript, 2023.

a character and an external force). The plot tension generally revolves around the protagonist's desire and the antagonistic elements (see "antagonist") working against that desire.

Conflict stories: Gospel stories that narrate Jesus' controversies with an opposing person or group. Also called controversy stories.

Denouement: the last phase of a story, following the climax; literally the "tying up of loose ends."

Didactic: having the intention or impulse to teach.

Discourse: an address to an audience.

Dramatic monologue: a literary work in which a single speaker addresses an implied but silent listener and in which various details keep this dramatic situation alive in the reader's consciousness.

Emblem: a symbolic and sometimes pictorial image to which a person or thing is compared.

Emblematic blazon: a love poem that lists the features of the beloved and compares them to objects or emblems in nature or human experience.

Encomium: a work of literature that praises an abstract quality or a generalized character type.

Encounter stories: gospel stories in which a person is confronted with the claims of Jesus, which that person must either accept or reject.

Epic: a long narrative having a number of conventional characteristics.

Epiphany: a moment of heightened insight in a literary work.

Epistle: a letter that attains literary status by virtue of the literary techniques used in it.

Epithalamion: a lyric poem that celebrates a wedding.

Epithet: an exalted title for a person or thing; a feature of the high style, especially as found in epic.

Explication: the literary term for close reading of a text. It implies not only careful analysis of a text but also putting one's analysis into organized form for written or oral presentation to an audience.

Exposition: the opening phase of a story in which the writer presents the background information that the reader needs in order to understand the plot that will subsequently unfold.

Expository writing: writing whose main purpose is to convey information.

Ellipsis: the author may drop an element of what is expected in the story in order to draw attention to it.

Extended Echo Effect: the repetition of parallel ordering, elements, or features in multiple narrative units (A-B-C, A-B-C). Similar to "typological pattern," but without the inclusion of prophetic expectation.

Flashback: a scene that interrupts the narrative to show events that happened at an earlier time, providing background or context.

Foil: something within a work of literature that heightens or sets off a main element in the work. A foil is usually a contrast (either a character, event, or image), but sometimes it is a parallel.

Foreshadowing: involves hints or indications of what is to come later in the story, creating anticipation or suspense.

Folk literature: literature couched in the language of everyday speech and appealing to the common person. Also called popular literature.

Genre: a literary type or kind.

Hero: a protagonist who is exemplary and representative of a whole community.

Hero story, heroic narrative: a story built around the character and exploits of a protagonist who is exemplary and representative of a whole community.

Hybrid forms: narratives that combine elements of one or more genres.

Hyperbole: a figure of speech in which a writer uses conscious exaggeration for the sake of effect, usually emotional effect.

Imagery: descriptive language that appeals to the senses, helping to create a vivid mental picture for the reader.

Image: any concrete picture of reality or human experience, including any sensory experience, a setting, a character, or an event.

Inclusio: the bracketing of a unit of text identified by the repetition of features or elements at the beginning and end of the unit.

Interchange: an alternation of elements in the story which can cause heightened literary irony or develop comparative imaging.

Irony: a contrast between expectation and reality which can take various forms:

> **Verbal Irony:** occurs when a speaker says one thing but means another.

> **Situational Irony:** occurs when there is a discrepancy between what is expected to happen and what actually occurs.

> **Dramatic Irony:** a situation where the reader knows something which some or all the characters in a story are ignorant.

Janus: a bidirectional turning point looking both backward and forward.

Juxtaposition: placing two contrasting elements side by side to highlight their differences or create a particular effect.

> **Comparison:** the juxtaposition of similar elements such as words, imagery, or events.

> **Contrast:** the juxtaposition of dissimilar elements such as words, imagery, or events.

Lyric: a short poem containing the thoughts or feelings of a speaker. The emotional quality, even more than the reflective, is usually considered the differentia of lyric.

Metaphor: a figure of speech in which the writer makes an implied comparison between two phenomena.

Miracle stories: gospel narratives that focus on miracles that Jesus performed.

Motif: a recurring element, theme, or idea in a narrative that has symbolic significance and helps to develop the story's themes.

Narrative Perspective (Point of View): the lens through which the story is told, affecting the reader's perception. Common perspectives include:

> **First-Person:** the narrator is a character in the story, using "I" or "we."

> **Second-Person:** the narrator addresses the reader directly using "you."

> **Third-Person Limited:** the narrator is outside the story but knows the thoughts and feelings of one character.

> **Third-Person Omniscient:** the narrator knows all the thoughts and feelings of all characters.

Narrative space: narrators may employ physical space / locations as part of the setting, but may also assign symbolic meaning to certain physical spaces.

Narrative sequence: narrators may employ dischronological narrative in the form of previews or flashbacks in an advantageous way to the story.

Narrative time: in real history, time is a constant. But in narrative literature, the narrator may speed up (pass many years briefly) or slow down (focus an extended portion of text in a brief window of time) according to his discretion.

Normative character: a character in a story who expresses or embodies what the storyteller wishes us to understand is correct.

Occasional literature: a work of literature that takes its origin from a particular historical event or a particular situation in the writer's life.

Ode: an exalted lyric poem that celebrates a dignified subject in a lofty style.

Parable: a brief narrative that explicitly embodies one or more themes.

Paradox: an apparent contradiction that upon reflection is seen to express a genuine truth; the contradiction must be resolved or explained before we see its truth.

Parallelism: the verse form in which all biblical poetry is written. The general definition that will cover the various types of parallelism is as follows: two or more lines that form a pattern based on repetition or balance of thought or grammar. The phrase thought couplet is a good working synonym.

> **Stairstep parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which the last key word of a line becomes the first main word in the next line.
>
> **Synonymous parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which two or more lines state the same idea in different words but in similar grammatical form; the second line repeats the content of all or part of the first line.
>
> **Synthetic parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which the second line completes the thought of the first line, but without repeating anything from the first line. also called growing parallelism.

Parody: a work of literature that parallels but inverts the usual meaning of a literary genre or a specific earlier work of literature.

Passion stories: gospel stories that narrate the events surrounding the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Pastoral: literature in which the setting, characters, and events are those of the shepherd's world.

Personification: a figure of speech in which human attributes are given to something nonhuman, such as animals, objects, or abstract qualities.

Plot: the sequence of events in a story, usually based on a central conflict and having a beginning, middle, and end.

Plot Twist: an unexpected or surprising turn of events in a narrative that alters the direction of the story or changes the reader's understanding of the plot.

Poetic justice: the feature of stories by which good characters are rewarded and evil characters are punished.

Poetic license: figurative language that is not literally true or factual.

Proportion: highlighting a work's emphasis by the quantitative amount it occupies in the narrative.

Protagonist: the leading character in a story, whether sympathetic or unsympathetic.

Proverb: a concise, memorable expression of truth.

Pun: a play on words, often using a word that sounds like another word but that has a different meaning.

Repetition: the recurrence of similar or identical elements (words, actions, concepts).

Resolution: following the climax, the part of the story where the conflict is resolved and the narrative comes to a conclusion. It ties up loose ends and provides closure for the characters and the plot.

Rhetorical question: a figure of speech in which the writer asks a question whose answer is so obvious that it is left unstated; a question asked, not to elicit information, but for the sake of effect, usually an emotional effect.

Rising Action: rising action is the building of tension as the plot conflict escalates towards the climax.

Sarcasm: the use of irony to mock or convey contempt, often through exaggerated statements that are not meant to be taken literally.

Satire: the exposure, through ridicule or rebuke, of human vice or folly.

Satiric norm: the standard by which the object of attack is criticized in a satire.

Setting: the time and place in which a story occurs.

Simile: a figure of speech in which the writer compares two phenomena, using the explicit formula "like" or "as."

Suspense: the feeling of anticipation or anxiety about what will happen next in the story, often created through uncertainty or danger.

Symbol: any detail in a work of literature that in addition to its literal meaning stands for something else.

Symbolism: involves the use of symbols to represent ideas or concepts beyond their literal meaning, often conveying deeper significance.

Theme: a generalization about life that a work of literature as a whole embodies or implies.

Tone: the attitude or emotional stance of the narrator or author towards the subject matter, conveyed through word choice and style.

Tragedy: a narrative form built around an exceptional calamity stemming from the protagonist's wrong choice.

Turning point (character): the place in a narrative where a character's characterization changes significantly due to events in the plot.

Turning point (plot): the point from which, at least in retrospect, the reader can begin to see how the plot conflict will be resolved.

Typological pattern: the prophetic expectation of similarities in character or events. Similar to "extended echo effect," but with the inclusion of prophetic expectation.

Voice: the distinct personality and style of the narrator or author, influencing how the story is perceived.

Well-made plot: a plot that unfolds according to the following pattern: exposition (background information), inciting moment (or inciting force), rising action, turning point (the point from which, at least in retrospect, the reader can begin to see how the plot conflict will be resolved), further complication, climax, and denouement.

Witness stories: gospel stories in which either Jesus or another character testifies about Jesus or his works. Also called testimony stories.

Occasion

Who?

Table 2: Tabulation of Key Phrases in Numbers

Phrase	References	Count
וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה "And Yahweh spoke to Moses"	1:1, 48; 2:1; 3:5, 11, 14, 44; 4:1, 17, 21; 5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 8:1, 5, 23; 9:1, 9; 10:1; 13:1; 14:26; 15:1, 17; 16:20, 23; 17:1, 9, 16; 18:25; 19:1; 20:7; 25:10, 16; 26:52; 28:1; 31:1; 33:50; 34:1, 16; 35:1, 9	43
צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה "Yahweh commanded Moses"	1:19, 54; 2:33, 34; 3:51; 4:49; 8:3, 20, 22; 9:5; 15:36; 26:4; 27:11; 30:1, 17; 31:7, 21, 31, 41, 47; 36:10	21
עַל־פִּי יְהוָה "According to the command of Yahweh"[14]	Nu 3:16, 39, 51; 4:37, 41, 45, 49; 9:18, 20, 23 (twice); 10:13; 13:3; 33:2, 38; 36:5	16
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "Speak to the sons of Israel"	5:6, 12; 6:2; 9:10; 15:2, 18, 38; 17:17; 19:2; 33:51; 35:10	11

  The text itself never explicitly identifies its author, however, Moses would meet Yahweh in the tent of meeting (1:1; also Lev 1:1) and they spoke face to face (Exod 33:11). As identified in Table 2 above, common phrases in Numbers include, "And Yahweh spoke to Moses" (43x), "Yahweh commanded Moses" (21x) and "According to the command of Yahweh" (16x). Considerable portions of the text of Numbers include what Yahweh spoke to Moses. Moses, then, is by far the most likely candidate for the text's authorship. In writing Numbers, Moses gave direct testimony of what Yahweh said. Multiple places in the Pentateuch note Moses writing (Exod 17:14; 24:4; 34:27–28; Num 33:2; Deut 28:58, 61; 29:20–21, 27; 31:9, 22, 24). Joshua also noted the Mosaic origin of the written law (Josh 8:31–34), some of which appears in Numbers. Jesus and other New Testament authors believed in Mosaic authorship.[15] This paper, then, assumes Mosaic authorship, although allowance for later inspired revisions is acceptable.[16] The name "Moses" is a wordplay on the verb משׁה, "to draw out."

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[14] As translated in the LEB.

[15] See Matthew 8:4; 19:7–8; Mark 7:10; 10:3; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 20:37; 24:44; Rom 10:19; 1 Cor 9:9; 2 Cor 3:15; etc.

[16] Presumably the editorial work, if any, was of the minor sort. This argument for Numbers, as with all Bible arguments by this present author, reject wholesale the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis of JEDP composition of the Pentateuch / Hexateuch. The hypothesis suffers from several fatal flaws. First, they applied a biological evolutionary framework—all the rage in the nineteenth century—to the development of religion, from simple to complex. Second, they had rationalistic prejudices against the supernatural. Third, they committed the gross logical fallacy of begging the question, commencing (and concluding) with their *a priori* beliefs. They were selective in highlighting evidence if it aligned with their view and ignoring or downplaying that which that did not. Fourth, they

To Whom?

The author of Numbers never explicitly identified his audience. As noted in Table 2 above, however, Yahweh commanded Moses, "Speak to the sons of Israel" eleven times in Numbers. The events of Numbers cover the period of time from departing Sinai to arriving in the plains of Moab, just opposite Jericho. The narrative thus covers some 38 years and was most likely written to the second generation of Israelites—those who had grown up in the wilderness and were about to follow Joshua into Canaan. Additionally, the author mentioned no fewer than eight times that certain regulations were "eternal decrees" [17] for the Israelites, and other practices intended for all generations of Israelites.[18] Thus, Moses wrote primarily for the second generation of Israelites about to enter Canaan, and secondarily to subsequent generations after them.

When?

Table 3 identifies the date stamps of major events relative to the Exodus as described in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Certain events, like the setting up and anointing of the tent of meeting, are described in all three books.

Table 3: Date Stamps Relating to the Exodus

Date (in relation to the Exodus)	Event	Reference
Year 1, month 1, day 15	Israelites depart Rameses	Num 33:1
Year 1, month 2, day 15	Israelites depart Elim for Desert of Sin	Exod 16:1
Year 1, month 3, day 15(?)[19]	Israelites arrive at Sinai	Exod 19:1
Year 2, month 1, day 1	Tabernacle set up and anointed	Exod 40:2, 17; Lev 8:10
Year 2, month 1, day 1[20]	Moses finished setting up the tabernacle	Num 7:1
Year 2, month 2(?),[21] day 1	Command for first census	Num 1:1

blatantly ignored developments in archaeology and other fields that would have forced them to revise their views. Fifth, they freely emended or excised portions of text inimical to their theory. Sixth, the use of names of God as deterministic of authorship has long since been shown as fallacious. Lastly, Graf and Wellhausen, as with other German liberals of their century, exhibited an arrogant over-assurance in their own work. They employed circular logic, assuming their starting hypothesis as true and then forcing all the evidence to support it. See R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 505–42.

[17] 10:8; 15:15; 18:8, 11, 19, 23; 19:10, 21.

[18] 15:14, 21, 23, 38; 35:29.

[19] Exodus 19:1 does not provide an ordinal for the day, but rather mentions, בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה "on this day," possibly meaning exactly two months after departing. Since the departure was on the 15th of the first month, the arrival at Sinai, in this case, would be the 15th of the third month.

[20] No date stamp is given in Numbers 7:1. However, the date stamp for the exact same event is provided in Exodus 40:17, thus the date is known.

[21] The month is not given in Numbers 1:1. However, 1:18 records that it was the first day of the second month, and it seems unlikely that the command in 1:1 and the carrying out of that command in 1:18 would be spoken of in such proximity while referring to different months.

Year 2, month 2, day 1	First census	Num 1:18
Year 2, month 1, day 14	Israel celebrates the Passover in the Desert of Sinai	Num 9:1–4
Year 2, month 2, day 20	Departure from Sinai	Num 10:11
Year (?), Month 1, day (?)[22]	Death of Miriam in Desert of Zin	Num 20:1
Year 40, month 5, day 1	Death of Aaron at Mount Hor	Num 33:38

Given that the events of Numbers include the forty years following the Exodus, Moses most likely wrote Numbers toward the end of the forty years of wilderness wanderings once the Israelites had reached the plains of Moab. The two most commonly accepted dates for the Exodus and subsequent wilderness wanderings are either the late 15th century BC or the late 13th century BC.

Where?

Summarizing the entire book, Numbers 36:13 states, "These are the commands and regulations the Lord gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho" (NIV). The events recorded in the book of Numbers cover a range of geographical locations, reflective of the Israelites' forty years of travels from leaving Egypt to just prior to entering Canaan. Moses most likely completed his work on the book of Numbers while the Israelites were encamped in the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho. Table 4 below summarizes the Israelites movements from Exodus to Deuteronomy.

Table 4: Summary of the Israelites Travels from Exodus to Deuteronomy[23]

Location / Travel	Reference
In Egypt	Exod 1–13
Egypt to Sinai	Exod 13–19
At Sinai	Exod 19–40; Leviticus 1–27; Num 1–10
Sinai to Kadesh Barnea	Num 10–13
Kadesh Barnea to Plains of Moab	Num 20–22
Plains of Moab	Num 22–36; Deut 1–34

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[22] As the departure from Sinai occurred in the second month of the second year, and Miriam was still alive at that point, her death in the "first month" must be in the third year at the earliest, if not later.

[23] Table adapted from Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 18.

Why?

The major inciting events for which Moses wrote Numbers were his upcoming death[24] and the upcoming entry into Canaan.[25] Knowing of his inability to lead the second generation of Israelites into the Promised Land, he wanted to ensure that they—and future generations of Israelites—would know (1) that Yahweh had appointed Moses to deliver the Law which governed the Israelites, (2) that Yahweh had appointed Aaron and his sons as priests to the nation, (3) that Yahweh had appointed the Levites to serve a special cultic role for the nation, (4) that Joshua had taken the mantle of leadership from Moses, (5) the importance of observing the divinely ordained leadership roles in the nation of Israel,[26] (6) that Yahweh had promised victory over their enemies in Canaan,[27] and (7) that even severe disobedience to Yahweh did not change God's plan for Israel to carry the line of promise.

Moses wanted the Israelites to know all these things so that the Israelites would (1) follow the divinely ordained leadership structure for the nation, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land in order to fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.[28]

Genre

Moses wrote the book of Numbers as an historical narrative. Significant portions of legal and ritual text do not change the narrative genre to a legal / law genre. Rather, the legal texts form a part of the narrative.

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[24] Moses knew he would die prior to entering the Promised Land. Yahweh had declared as much: "But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not trusted in me, to regard me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land that I have given to them"" (Num 20:12); and Moses repeated that idea elsewhere: "And Yahweh was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I would not cross the Jordan and that I would not go to the good land that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance. For I am going to die in this land; I am not going to cross the Jordan, but you are going to cross, and you are going to take possession of this good land" (Deut 4:21–22).

[25] As per Genesis 15:13–16.

[26] Specifically, the unique roles of Moses, Aaron and his sons as priests, and the Levites. These people and groups had specifically ordained roles relative to the rest of the tribes.

[27] The examples of military victory in Numbers show how Yahweh will help them achieve victory in Canaan.

[28] Without obedience to the Law as revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, Israel would fail to be a holy nation and kingdom of priests, and so the surrounding nations would never see Yahweh's holiness.

Proposed Message Statement

In order to address his upcoming death and the Israelites' upcoming conquest of Canaan after decades of wandering in the wilderness, Moses wrote an historical narrative in the plains of Moab for the generation of Israelites about to enter the Promised Land under Joshua—and future generations—in order that they would know (1) the divinely appointed leadership roles within Israel,[29] (2) the cost of deviating from them,[30] and (3) that Yahweh would provide victory for them in Canaan and use their nation to carry the line of promise despite disobedience, so that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel,[31] (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

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[29] They needed to know (1) that Yahweh had appointed Moses to deliver the Law which governed the Israelites, (2) that Yahweh had appointed Aaron and his sons as priests to the nation, (3) that Yahweh had appointed the Levites to serve a special cultic role for the nation, (4) that Joshua had taken the leadership mantle from Moses, and (5) the importance of observing this divinely ordained differentiation in roles. With the deaths of Moses and Aaron, the Israelites needed to know that Joshua and Aaron's sons were, respectively, the next civil and religious leaders of the nation.

[30] The various rebellions and their judgments show the terrible price paid when God's ordained leadership structure is ignored.

[31] Joshua as civil / military leader, and Aaron's sons as priestly / religious leaders.

Proposed Outline[32]

Scholars have long debated the structure—if any—to the book of Numbers. Proposed divisions by geography, chronology, or subject matter all face shortcomings.[33] At a minimum, the book has two major sections as indicated in the text by Yahweh's command to take a census (1:2; 26:2). These two censuses applied to the first generation of Israelites (1:1–25:18) who experienced the Exodus and Sinai under Moses, and then to the second generation (26:1–36:13) who were about to enter the Promised Land under Joshua.

I.   Failure of the first generation (1:1–25:18)
      A. Census of the first generation (1:1–4:49)
      B. Various instructions (5:1–6:27)
      C. Tabernacle and celebration (7:1–10:10)
      D. Narrative demonstrations (10:11–19:22)
      E. Yahweh's faithfulness despite disobedience (20:1–25:18)

II.   Preparation of the second generation (26:1–36:13)
      A. Census of the second generation (26:1–65)
      B. Regulations for the Promised Land (27:1–30:16)
      C. Defeat of the Midianites (31:1–54)
      D. Transjordan tribes (32:1–42)
      E. Travelogue of Israel (33:1–49)
      F. Regulations for the Promised Land (33:50–36:13)

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[32] This proposed outline is adapted from R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 37–39.

[33] For a treatment on the difficulty of structuring the book of Numbers, see Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Numbers–Ruth (Revised Edition)*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 40–47.

Use of Rhetoric in Numbers

Classical rhetoric employs three modes and three species of rhetoric. The three modes of rhetoric include *logos*,[34] *pathos*,[35] and *ethos*.[36] The three species include judicial,[37] epideictic,[38] and deliberative[39] rhetoric.[40] As will be demonstrated in the proposed argument exposition below, Moses employed emotional (*pathos*) and ethical (*ethos*) appeals within the narrative for an overall deliberative purpose. He also used the epideictic rhetorical technique of *praise and blame*.

Ethically, Moses appealed to authority: the Israelites should obey him because he was Yahweh's authorized mediator / prophet who delivered the Law to Israel. For example, the phrase, "Yahweh spoke to Moses," occurs 43 times in Numbers, "Yahweh commanded Moses," 21 times, and, "According to Yahweh's command," 16 times. Moses thus pointed to Yahweh as the source (authority) for his own role as intermediary between God and the people.

Moses also used the epideictic rhetorical technique of *praise and blame*. The various rebellions and their ensuing judgments point to blameworthy, or censurable, examples for the audience to avoid. The fearful judgments that came upon the rebels[41] serve to elicit a fearful emotional response (*pathos*) in the audience so that they dare not rebel.

The section above had described how the phrase, "Yahweh spoke to Moses," occurs 33 times in Leviticus. Many of those 33 are followed by a command to Moses to tell the Israelites what Yahweh had said. Moses also employed ethical arguments by appealing to Yahweh's character (*ethos*): Yahweh repeatedly emphasized obedience because (1) he had

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[34] The rhetoric of *logos* employs logical arguments intended to appeal to rational principles found within the author's discourse.

[35] The rhetoric of *pathos* employs arguments intended to arouse an emotional reaction and play upon the audience's feelings.

[36] The rhetoric of *ethos* makes ethical appeals on the basis of credibility: good character or authority.

[37] With judicial rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events that occurred in the past. This judgment often deals with questions of truth or justice, and can be positive (a defense or "apology" of correctness / innocence) or negative (a prosecution, emphasizing guilt).

[38] With epideictic rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade his audience to hold or reaffirm a certain point of view in the present time. The author wants to increase (or decrease / undermine) his audience's asset to a certain value or belief. To this end, epideictic rhetoric will frequently use examples of *praise* and *blame*.

[39] With deliberative rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to take (or not take) some action in the (often near) future. Deliberative rhetoric deals with questions of self-interest and future benefits for the audience, and appears in the form of exhortation (positive) or warning (negative).

[40] For a complete discussion of classical rhetoric in biblical studies, see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

[41] Such as facing 40 years of wilderness wandering, being consumed by Yahweh's fire, being swallowed into the ground, plagues, snake bites, etc.

delivered them from Egypt,[42] and (2) Yahweh himself was holy.[43] Since Moses intended his audience to obey the decrees written in Leviticus, his overall rhetorical purpose is deliberative. Thus, his ethical, emotional, and epideictic rhetoric serves an overall deliberative purpose: that the Israelites be holy by following the Law.

Critical Issues: The Large Numbers in Numbers

The apparently large numbers in the census for the Exodus generation, which would place the total population around approximately two million or more, are problematic. Scholars point out the various logistical, archaeological, and practical considerations which make the large numbers difficult to understand as historically accurate. Linguistic difficulties are also present in this problem: אֶלֶף, "one thousand," can also be rendered as a "troop" with varying actual counts of soldiers present. The spelling also approximates אַלּוּף, a "chief" or "tribal leader." Therefore, some speculate the numbers refer to the number of chiefs and men in each tribe, which would reduce the total to the thousands or tens of thousands. Others suggest the large numbers are original and were intended to serve a rhetorical purpose in the narrative. Others take the large numbers literally, despite the inherent logistical problems.[44] It is a vexing problem that goes beyond this paper alone.

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[42] Such statements occur in 11:45; 19:36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38; 25:42, 55; 26:13, 45.

[43] See 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8.

[44] For a good overview of the issue of the large numbers, see Allen, "Numbers," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 680–91.

Proposed Argument Exposition

In the **failure of the first generation (1:1–25:18)**, Moses' description of the Israelites' unfaithfulness at Kadesh Barnea resulting forty years of wilderness wandering reveal to his audience the gravity of rebelling against Yahweh and his appointed leaders in Israel. Numerous other rebellions against the divinely ordained leadership structure for Israel provide censurable examples (epideictic rhetoric) for Moses' second generation audience. The punishments on the rebels elicit a fearful emotional state (*pathos*) that seek to persuade the audience to obey the Law and Yahweh's divinely ordained leadership structure. However, despite the failure of the people, and even Moses himself, the oracles of Balaam reveal that God still intended to use Israel as the carrier of the promise in order that they might bring blessing to the nations. The second generation could thus have hope in Yahweh and in their upcoming victory in the land of Canaan.

That the book of Numbers begins (1:1) with a waw consecutive, וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה, connects it literarily to Leviticus 27:34, the immediately preceding verse.[45] With the **census of the first generation (1:1–4:49),** Moses immediately began establishing his own credibility (*ethos*) as the one to whom Yahweh speaks (1:1) and thus the human intermediary to, and leader of, Israel. It is at his command that the Israelites arrange themselves to be counted (1:18–20). Moses then made several points that distinguish the Levites from all the other tribes. First, the Levites were not counted in the census (1:48). Instead of being counted, Moses highlighted their role in caring for the tabernacle (1:50–53). Second, any non-Levite would die if they approached the tabernacle (1:51). Third, the Levites' camping around the מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדֻת, "tabernacle of the testimony" also prevented Yahweh's wrath from falling upon the Israelites (1:53). All of these points serve Moses' purpose of creating a separation between the Levites and the other tribes.

The camping and marching arrangements (2:1–34) also highlighted the special place and role of the Levites in contrast to all the other tribes. Furthermore, Moses' audience of second generation Israelites could know how they were to continue their camping and marching formations as they headed into the Promised Land.

With his account of the distinct census of the Levites (3:1–4:49), Moses continued to highlight the Levitical tribe as set apart from all the others. First, the requirements for counting were different than the other tribes.[46] Second, instead of serving in the military like the men of the other tribes (1:3), the Levites were to assist Aaron in his priestly duties (3:5). Third, the role of the Levites as assigned to various aspects of service in the tabernacle and the injunctions that any non-Levite would die if they tried to do the same (3:10, 38; 4:15) also sets them apart. Fourth, that Yahweh accepted the 22,000 Levites in place of Israel's firstborn sons (3:12–13, 39–50) further distinguished them and identified them as intermediaries between Yahweh and the people. The distribution of duties in care of the tabernacle (3:21–37; 4:4–49) also distinguished between the clans of Levites in their various responsibilities, as well as the role of Aaron and the priests (3:38; 4:15–20). Moses' audience could thus know the importance of maintaining the

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[45] The similarity in characters (Yahweh and Moses) and geographical references (Mount Sinai / Desert of Dinah) in Leviticus 27:34 (Mount Sinai) suggest continuity as well.

[46] They counted all Levite males one month or older. For the other tribes, they counted all males aged 20 and over. The Levites were sub-totaled by clans, while the other tribes were not.

distinction between the priests, the Levites, and the common people.[47] Among Moses' audience, the various clans of the Levites—and future generations—could know their respective duties and that they were assigned according to Yahweh's word. The rhetoric of this section is primarily ethical, based on the authority of Yahweh who commanded Moses to take the census (*ethos*), and it contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation. Literarily, the narrative of the census contributes to the setting of the book, but there is nothing in the text to cause literary tension.

With his inclusion of **various instructions (5:1–6:27)**, Moses intended his second generation audience of priests, Levites, and common Israelites to understand the requirements pertaining to camp purity (5:1–4), the restitution for offenses (5:5–10), the test of an adulterous wife (5:11–31),[48] the requirements for a Nazirite vow (6:1–21), and the priestly blessing (6:22–27).[49] Both the common people and the priests could know their respective duties in these areas of responsibility. As with most legal texts, the rhetoric is deliberative because of the text's direct commands. These regulations contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

Literarily, Moses' narrative on the **tabernacle and celebration (7:1–10:10)**[50] contributes information to the setting. No literary tension is added because of the ideal obedience of everyone involved. Moses' portrayal of the dedication of the tent of meeting and right relationships between the priests, the Levites, the leaders of the tribes, and the people highlights the distinctions between each group. Everyone played their part, and Moses was careful to distinguish the roles of the Levites (7:6–9) under the direction of the priests (7:8). His directions to the priests (8:1–3) and the consecrating of the Levites (8:4–26) sets them apart for holy work. This consecration was done in the full view of Israel (8:9) with the laying of hands (8:10) and sacrifices (8:12–14). Continued injunctions to set apart the Levites for Yahweh (8:14, 17, 18, 19) identify them as having a special role in Israel. Moses' second generation audience could thus know on the basis of Yahweh's authority that the priests and the Levites were appointed for the

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[47] Even the Levites would die if they exceeded their role and did what was only permitted for priests (4:20).

[48] This is possibly what Moses had done at Sinai when he sprinkled the dust of the golden calf into the water and forced the Israelites to drink it. Some physical manifestation would have made obvious who was unfaithful, thus identifying them for the Levites to kill (Exod 32).

[49] The priestly blessing emphasized Yahweh's blessing upon the nation and his intimate relationship with them as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

[50] The events in this section actually take place in the month prior to the census. However, Moses placed it here probably because of his intended structure for the book with the first generation census beginning in ch. 1 and the second generation census beginning in ch. 26 as the major structural markers for each generation.

cultic work of the tabernacle, while the other tribes were not. That the actions of Levites prevented disaster from coming upon the Israelites (8:19) established them as intermediaries or mediators between Yahweh and the people.

Moses' record of the second celebration of the Passover (9:1–14)[51] introduced literary tension in that certain unclean people could not take part (9:6). Yahweh's command to Moses (9:10–14) resolved the tension and provided a lasting regulation for Moses' audience and future generations of Israelites regarding the Passover. That the people would bear the consequences of their sin (9:13) foreshadows the forty years of wilderness wandering as punishment for the sin of rebellion at Kadesh Barnea (ch. 14).

The portrayal of the Israelites' obedience to Yahweh in encamping and setting out (9:15–10:10) employed the epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame. The Israelites here function as a praiseworthy example to the second generation audience. Just as the first generation obeyed Yahweh through Moses, so Moses wanted the second generation to obey Yahweh through Joshua. Moses highlighted the role of the priests in blowing trumpets (10:8) to communicate the will of Yahweh, so setting the expectation of obedience to priests by his audience and by future generations.

In these ways, the elements of the narrative on the tabernacle and celebration (7:1–10:10) contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

The next major section of the book includes a series of **narrative demonstrations (10:11–19:22)** where Moses employed the epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame in a series of narrative examples—both praiseworthy and blameworthy—interspersed with laws and regulations for his second generation Israelite audience to follow. The narrative demonstrations show that those who are faithful to Yahweh's word / Moses' word are blessed, and those who are rebellious or unfaithful receive punishment. The audience can therefore see the incentives for obedience and disincentives for disobedience. Literarily, Moses introduced tension into the narrative: despite the departure from Sinai obediently following the camp divisions ordained in ch. 2 (10:11–28), Moses' request for Hobab to join them in order to be their eyes and show them where to camp (10:29–31) displays a distrust of the cloud of Yahweh (9:15–23), which the Israelites were to follow to and from encampments. This distrust introduces tension into the story which develops more fully with each successive rebellion.

The tension escalates in a cycle of four successively worse displays of distrust and rebellion, leading to the climactic rebellion at Kadesh Barnea: (1) the Israelites complaining about their hardship (11:1–3), (2) the rabble craving meat (11:4–35), (3) the challenge of Aaron and Miriam (12:1–16), and (4) the whole community at Kadesh Barnea (13:1–14:45). That each rebellion resulted in a divine punishment[52] would communicate to Moses' second generation audience the importance of following the divinely ordained leaders, as well as the cost of rebelling against them. Rhetorically, Moses used the Israelites as blameworthy examples to

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[51] The first Passover was celebrated the night the Israelites departed from Egypt, the year prior.

[52] Consuming fire (11:1–3), a plague (11:33), leprosy (12:10), and death in the wilderness over a forty year period (14:33–34).

avoid. The dreadful punishments would elicit a fearful emotional response (*pathos*) that functions as a disincentive against rebelling.

As shown in Table 5, the three major journeys of the Israelites reveal an extended echo effect as many elements are repeated.

Table 5: Extended Echo Effect of the three journeys of the Israelites[53]

Event / Journey	Red Sea to Sinai	Sinai to Kadesh	Kadesh to Moab
Led by cloud	Exod 13:21	Num 10:11–12	-
Victory over enemy nation	Exod 13:14	-	Num 21:21–35
Victory song / poem	Exod 15:1–18	Num 10:35	Num 21:14–15
Miriam	Exod 15:20–21	Num 12	Num 20:1
People complain	Exod 15:23–24	Num 11:1	Num 21:5
Moses' intercession	Exod 15:25	Num 11:2	Num 21:7
Well	Exod 15:27	-	Num 21:16
Manna and quail	Exod 16	Num 11:4–35	-
Water from rock	Exod 17:1–7	-	Num 20:2–13
Victory over Amalek	Exod 17:8–16	-	Num 21:1–3
Jethro	Exod 18:1–12	Num 10:29–32	-

The memory of the good food eaten in Egypt (11:5), claims of being better off in Egypt (11:18), and questions of why they ever departed Egypt (11:20) are the geminate forms of rebellion that will blossom fully and finally at Kadesh Barnea with a desire to appoint new leaders who will lead them back to Egypt (14:4, 10). That Moses felt the burden of the people in their rebellious state (11:10–15) was intended, by analogy, to cause sympathy among the audience for Joshua who would lead them into Canaan. In a case of judicial rhetoric, Moses implicitly intended that the second generation audience see the failure of the first and thus judge them as guilty, and therefore desire not to follow in their rebellious ways. Indeed, the rebellion was not a rejection of Moses, but a rejection of Yahweh himself (11:20). The plague (11:33) sent by Yahweh was the punishment previously revealed for going against Yahweh in hostility and being unwilling to listen (Lev 26:21).[54]

Even though Aaron and Miriam held special places in the Israelite community,[55] their challenge of Moses (12:1), possibly encouraged by the legitimate prophesying of the seventy elders (11:24–30), highlighted the *very* special place of Moses to speak on behalf of Yahweh. The audience could know that challenging Yahweh's intermediaries was serious and would result in punishment.

In the fourth rebellion of this cycle at Kadesh Barnea (13:1–14:45), Moses emphasized that the ten fearful spies enticed *the entire* Israelite assembly to rebel.[56] As a result,

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[53] Table adapted from Wenham, *Numbers*, TOTC, 4:19.

[54] "And if you go against me in hostility and you are not willing to listen to me, then I will add a plague onto you seven times according to your sins" (Lev 26:21).

[55] Aaron as high priest and Miriam as a prophetess / musical leader of the women (Exod 15:20).

[56] "*All* the community lifted up their voices" (14:1); "And *all* the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron" (14:2); "And *all* the community said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt or in this

the entire community—those aged twenty and up—would die in the wilderness over the next forty years (14:33–34) and that their children would suffer on account of their parents' unfaithfulness (14:33). In a case of situational irony, the lament of the people, "If only we had died … in this desert!" (14:2) is exactly what would happen as a result of that desire.[57] The pattern of God's revealed character in Exodus 34:6–7 (referenced by Moses in Num 14:18) is exactly what happened to the Israelites at Kadesh: with his loyal love (חֶסֶד), he forgave sin and rebellion (14:19–20), but surely left nothing unpunished (14:22–35),[58] visiting the sin of the fathers on the sons to the third and fourth generations (14:33).[59] Moses' audience, who were those children growing up as shepherds in the wilderness, could know that Yahweh's words had come to pass. They could also know that Yahweh takes rebellion very seriously, as they had experienced the results of their parents' rebellion firsthand.

The Israelites had been warned, "If you go against me in hostility and you are not willing to listen to me, then I will add a plague onto you" (Lev 26:21). The ten spies who gave the bad report died of plague (14:37).[60] In a stroke of irony, those who opposed Yahweh would come to know Yahweh's opposition: "you will … know what it is like to have me [Yahweh] against you" (14:34, NIV). Moses' second generation audience could know that going against Yahweh's chosen leader(s) for the nation is the same as treating Yahweh himself with contempt (14:23). Moses employed the epideictic rhetoric of praise in distinguishing Caleb as one with a different spirit—one who followed Yahweh wholeheartedly (14:24). The group who tried to enter Canaan against Moses' word and died trying (14:40–45) served as blameworthy examples for the audience. Moses implicitly wanted his audience to act faithfully like Caleb, and not like those who disobeyed. The note of Caleb's reward (14:24) and the death of those who went into the land (14:45) function as incentives for the audience to obey like Caleb. Moses employed narrative space by his use of wilderness juxtaposed by contrast against the land flowing with milk and honey. Not only was the wilderness a physically barren place, but also one which represented rebellion and spiritual barrenness.

The juxtaposition in outcomes between those who acted faithfully (Caleb and Joshua) and those who acted unfaithfully (the Israelite community) served as an incentive for Moses' second generation audience to obey his regulations regarding offerings (15:1–31), Sabbath rules (15:32–36), and tassels (15:37–41). The sabbath-breaker (15:32–36) served as a censurable

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desert!'" (14:2); Joshua and Caleb's exhortation against rebellion was to "*all* the community of the Israelites" (14:7); "And *all* the community said to stone them with stones" (14:10). Thus, five times in ten verses, Moses emphasized that the entire community—that is, those aged twenty and up—rebelled.

[57] Which is to say, they preferred death in the desert to death at the hands of their enemies. Indeed, that is exactly what would happen.

[58] The ten-fold testing, according to the Babylonian Talmud included the Israelites' complaints (or rebellion) at (1) the Sea (Exod 14:11–12), (2) at Mara (Exod 15:24), (3) the wilderness of Sin (Exod 16:2–3), (4) about the daily gathering of manna (Exod 16:20), (5) about no manna on the Sabbath (Exod 16:27), (6) at Rephidim (Exod 17:1–2), (7) at Sinai (Exod 32:1–6), (8) at Taberah (Num 11:1), (9) at Taberah regarding meat (Num 11:4), and (10) at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14:1–4). See Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 350.

[59] "And your children will be shepherds in the desert forty years" (14:33). Those under age twenty would suffer on account of the parents' sins.

[60] The word for "plague" in Leviticus 26:21 is מַכָּה, and in 14:38 is מַגֵּפָה. Despite the difference in vocabulary, the words are conceptually the same.

example (epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame) for the audience to avoid. Table 6 below reveals the extended echo effect between Mount Sinai, Kadesh Barnea, and the Plains of Moab.

Table 6: Extended Echo Effect of the three encampments of Israel[61]

Topic	Mount Sinai	Kadesh	Plains of Moab
Divine promises	Exod 19:5–6; 23:23	Num 13:2	Num 22–24
40 days	Exod 24:18	Num 13:25	-
Rebellion	Exod 32:1–8	Num 14:1–10	Num 25:1–3
Moses' intercession	Exod 32:11–13	Num 14:13–19	-
Judgment	Exod 32:34	Num 14:20–35	Num 25:4
Plague	Exod 32:35	Num 14:37	Num 25:8–9
Laws of sacrifice	Exod 34:18; Lev 1–7, etc.	Num 15:1–31	Num 28–29
Trial	Lev 24:10–23	Num 15:32–36	Num 27:1–11
Rebellion against priests	Lev 10:1–3	Num 16:1–35	-
Atonement through priests or Levites	Exod 32:26–29	Num 16:36–50	Num 25:7–13
Priestly prerogatives	Lev 6–7; 22	Num 17–18	Num 31:28–30; 35:1–8
Impurity rules	Lev 11–16; Num 9:6–14	Num 19	Num 31; 35:9
Census	Num 1–4	-	Num 26

The law that the one who "sins defiantly"[62] must die (15:30) is then played out with the man gathering wood on the Sabbath (15:32–36) and the Kohathite rebellion (16:1–17:15 MT [16:1–50]). That Korah and his fellow rebels are identified as "men of name," אַנְשֵׁי־שֵׁם, takes the audience back to the "men of name" in Genesis 6:2 and the builders of Babel who wanted to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4). Their defiant sin was assuming equality of roles between themselves and Aaron as High Priest (16:3). That Moses commanded them to prepare censers with incense echoes what happened to Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–2) and prepares the reader to anticipate their fiery judgment. Only the High Priest was to offer incense to Yahweh each morning and evening (Exod 30:7–8) and during the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12–13). So Moses offered them the chance to see who was truly the High Priest,[63] with the predictable result that those offering incense were consumed by fire (16:35). The devouring of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (16:30–32) is poetic justice and situational irony because the previous rebels had claimed the Promised Land devours its inhabitants (13:32) when in fact it was the wilderness that did so.[64] The sign of the hammered censers overlaying the altar (17:3 MT [16:38]) was intended to remind all the Israelites that only the High Priest in the line of Aaron could offer incense (17:5 MT [16:40]). For Moses' second generation, the challenge to Aaron's

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[61] Table adapted from Wenham, *Numbers*, TOTC, 4:20.

[62] Literally, "who acts with a raised hand," אֲשֶׁר־תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּיָד רָמָה (15:30).

[63] Numbers 16:11 specifies that the high-handed rebellion was against Aaron: "What is Aaron that you grumble against him?"

[64] Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 351.

authority—by Levites,[65] no less—would serve to emphasize the divinely ordained distinction of roles within Israel, and the severe consequences for ignoring or challenging them. Moses' identification of himself as the one sent by Yahweh according to a sign (16:28–30)[66] and then the occurrence of that sign (16:31–33) demonstrates his divinely appointed position as leader of Israel. His audience could thus know that when he handed off his leadership to Joshua, they should follow him as the one appointed by Yahweh.

The budding of Aaron's staff (17:16–28 MT [17:1–13]) likewise indicated for Moses' audience the unique position of Aaron and his sons as priests. Aaron's staff would function as a sign (אוֹת, 17:25 MT [17:10]) just like the altar of incense (17:3 MT [16:38]). These would be ongoing reminders to the Israelites (i.e., Moses' audience) of the special place of the priests.

The distinguishing of priests, Levites, and others in the Kohathite rebellion (16:1–17:15 MT [16:1–50]) and the budding of Aaron's staff (17:16–28 MT [17:1–13]) set up the audience for Yahweh's description of the distinct duties of priests and Levites (18:1–7),[67] where failure to distinguish will lead to death (18:3), as well as for the laws of purification with the ashes of the red heifer (19:1–22).[68] Furthermore, the distinguishing of who receives the tithes and offerings (18:8–32) furthers Moses' point that the priests are distinct from Levites, and the Levites are distinct from the rest of the tribes.[69]

Thus, Moses' series of narrative demonstrations (10:11–19:22) employed the epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame in a series of narrative examples—both praiseworthy and blameworthy—interspersed with laws and regulations for his second generation Israelite audience to follow. The narrative demonstrations showed how blessing came to those who are faithful to Yahweh's word and the divinely ordained leadership structure within Israel, while punishment would come to those who rebel against it. The narrative demonstrations function emotionally (*pathos*) and logically (*logos*) based on the fearful punishments of unfaithfulness and the superior outcomes of obedience. Judicial rhetoric is also involved, whereby Moses intended the second generation to condemn the first generation, thereby eliciting their commitment to avoid the same kind of rebellion.

In these ways, the elements of the narrative on the tabernacle and celebration (7:1–10:10) contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

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[65] "You take too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi!" (16:7). The Levites were not alone in rebelling, as certain Reubenites also joined the rebellion (16:1).

[66] The earth swallowing the rebels alive.

[67] For example, 18:1 notes the distinction, "You [Aaron] and your sons *alone*" (NIV, emphasis added), as does 18:7, "But only you and your sons may serve as priests" (NIV).

[68] The note that these commands were a חֻקַּת עוֹלָם, "everlasting ordinance," speaks to Moses' audience of the continual need to follow these regulations.

[69] To the priests belong (1) the grain, sin, guilt, and wave offerings, (2) the firstfruits, and (3) the consecrated (חֵרֶם) items belonging to Yahweh (18:8–16). However, the priests will not inherit any land (18:20). To the Levites belong the tithes of Israel (18:21), and from what they receive, the Levites still tithed to the priests (18:26).

Following Moses' narrative demonstrations (10:11–19:22) which implored the audience to obey for blessings and warn against rebellion because of the negative consequences, Moses then emphasized **Yahweh's faithfulness despite disobedience (20:1–25:18)**. The forty years of wilderness wandering represented a catastrophic punishment in the life of the new nation. Moses' audience might rightly wonder whether such rebellion had cause Yahweh to cast aside his plans for Israel. In this section, however, the failures of the Israelites—including Moses and Aaron—do not abrogate Yahweh's promises to the nation. The nation will carry the promise and be a blessing to all nations, and those who curse them will themselves be cursed (Gen 12:3). This would emphasize to Moses' second generation Israelite audience that Yahweh would remain faithful to his covenant promises to the nation despite the previous generation's failure. Thus, they should respond by trusting him as he leads them into the Promised Land.

The failure of Moses and Aaron (20:1–13) increases narrative tension and sets the stage for the juxtaposition of Yahweh's blessings in warfare (21:1–3) and in the prophetic future (22:1–24:25). The note that the Israelites came to Kadesh in the first month (20:1) does two things. First, regardless of the year,[70] Yahweh had instructed the Israelites to celebrate the Passover in the first month of each year (Exod 12; Lev 23:5; Num 9:3). Thus, they were intended to celebrate and remember Yahweh's faithfulness in delivering them out of Egypt. Ironically, they instead *complained* that Yahweh brought them out of Egypt (20:5). Second, by returning geographically to Kadesh Barnea, it elicits memory of the fateful events of Israel's first visit to Kadesh (13:1–14:45).[71] This is a use of narrative space with extremely negative connotations. For the audience, such repetition of geography would prompt a question as to whether the Israelites had learned from their previous mistake. The answer, however, is a negative: the people "gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron" (20:2, NIV). While rebellion against Moses and Aaron was a pattern for the Israelites, the situational irony of this narrative account is that Moses and Aaron *also* rebelled and thus faced the same consequence (failure to enter the Promised Land) as the first generation had (ch. 14). That both rebellions[72] occurred at Kadesh Barnea is an example of repetition based on geography (narrative space). It also represents a turning point for Moses and Aaron, as they will be excluded from leading Israel into the Promised Land. The sin of Moses (20:10–13) is an example of narrative ambiguity.[73] By recording the death of Aaron and the transfer of the high priestly role to his son Eleazar (20:22–29), Moses intended his audience

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[70] Because of proximity to the events on the plains of Moab which immediately precede their entrance into Canaan, ch. 20 is presumably toward to the latter parts of the wilderness wanderings. Nevertheless, the year cannot be identified with certainty.

[71] The Israelite rebellion at Kadesh Barnea resulted in the forty years of wilderness wandering.

[72] (1) the first generation Israelites, and (2) Moses and Aaron.

[73] Multiple suggestions have been proposed, such as: (1) Moses struck the rock instead of speaking, (2) Moses struck it twice, not once, (3) Moses spoke to the people instead of the rock, (4) Moses was angry at the people, (5) Moses called the people "rebels," overstepping his present responsibility, (6) Moses's question may have cast doubt on God's power, (7) Moses may have actually doubted, (8) Moses spoke and performed an action like an ordinary magician, and (9) Moses said "must we bring …," taking too much credit on himself and Aaron. See Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 354.

to recognize and respect Eleazar as the next High Priest. He would be their spiritual leader going into the Promised Land.

In the book of Genesis, the Edomites had been identified as a serpent seed nation. The denial of passage by the Edomites (20:14–21) is an outworking of the opposition between the nation with the promise and this particular serpent seed nation. Edom's refusal is characteristic of future conflict between the nations (e.g., Obadiah), and served as later grounds of punishment for Edom (e.g., Amos 1:11).

The destruction of Arad (21:1–3) is an outworking of Yahweh's promise in Genesis 12:3 to curse those who cursed Israel. The destruction of Sihon and Og and their kingdoms (21:21–35) is also an outworking of Noah's prophetic declaration that the descendants of Canaan would be ruled by the descendants of Shem (Gen 9:25–27). Indeed, the conquering of Sihon (king of the Amorites) and the Israelites settling there instigated fulfillment of the land promise from Genesis 15:21 where the land of the Amorites was promised to Abraham's descendants. Moses' audience could know that despite the sins and rebellion of the people and leaders of Israel, Yahweh's covenant promises to them regarding the land would stand fast, and they could trust his protection as they entered Canaan. And since the promise had been at least initially fulfilled, they could trust in the rest of its fulfillment as well.

With the narrative account of the bronze snake (21:4–9), Moses intended the literal snake bites to highlight to his second generation Israelite audience that the first generation had been, metaphorically speaking, bitten by the serpent of Genesis 3.[74] To fashion the bronze serpent, Moses likely killed one of the snakes and plated it with bronze. His action of killing the serpent was an allusion to the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 striking the serpent. That those who looked to the bronze serpent would live (21:8) is an allusion to the promise of eternal life for those who hope in the promised seed (Gen 3:15).

The narrative account of Balak and Balaam (22:1–24:25) functioned to show that despite failure within Israel, Yahweh would still use the nation to carry the line of promise and bring blessing to the Gentile nations. Balak functioned like an echo of Pharaoh, seeking to destroy the Israelites out of fear of their size and might (Exod 1:9; Num 22:6). In juxtaposition by contrast to Moses and Aarons' failure, Balaam—himself a pagan diviner—became the instrument of divine revelation and the one to offer sacrifices to Yahweh.[75] But even Balaam was rebuked by a donkey (22:28–33). It is situational irony that a donkey was the most spiritually astute character in this section, more so than Balaam, Balak, and even Moses and Aaron.[76]

The oracles of Balaam also reinforce and allude to Yahweh's previous pronouncements of covenant blessing and royal rule for Abraham and his descendants.[77] First, for

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[74] The word for "serpent" in Numbers 21 is the same as in Genesis 3, נָחָשׁ.

[75] R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, vol. 3B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 364–65.

[76] "That a donkey should be the most spiritually observant character in this section stands in sharp contradistinction to the characterization of the nations and the individual leaders, a literary slap-in-the-face toward any humanly conceived means of defining God and his ways" (Cole, *Numbers*, 365).

[77] For example, כָּרַע שָׁכַב כַּאֲרִי, "He crouches, he lies down like a lion" (24:9) as compared to כָּרַע רָבַץ כְּאַרְיֵה, "He bowed down; he crouched like a lion" (Gen 49:9). Also, מְבָרֲכֶיךָ בָרוּךְ וְאֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר, "They who

blessing and cursing, "There can be "no divination against Israel" (23:23) because those who try to curse Israel bring a curse upon themselves (24:9)."[78] In an act of poetic justice, Balaam essentially called for his own cursing, and his diminishment in the first through fourth oracles demonstrates this.[79] The nation's destruction is foretold by Balaam, "He will crush the foreheads of Moab"[80] (24:17) and King David would later defeat and subjugate the Moabites (2 Sam 8:2). Isaiah likewise prophesied of Moab's being trampled into the dust (Isa 25:10–12). Second, Balaam extended the idea of royal rule to military victory over Israel's enemies.[81] Lastly, the emphasis in the oracles on the spoken word of Yahweh (22:8, 18, 20, 35, 38; 23:3, 5, 12, 16–17, 26; 24:2–4, 12–13) demonstrated how the *character of the prophet* was not associated with the word he delivered *from Yahweh*. That is, in light of Moses and Aaron's failure and being sequestered (20:1–13), the audience might be tempted to conclude that the words they spoke for Yahweh were untrue. In an argument from greater to lesser, Moses (as the author) showed that if even an evil prophet could speak for Yahweh, so too could a fallible but righteous prophet.[82] From the oracles of Balaam, then, Moses' second generation Israelite audience could know that despite the first generation's disobedience, the nation still carried the promised seed who would crush the enemies of Israel according to the faithful and true words of Yahweh.

Moses' narrative account of the Israelites' infidelity at Shittim (25:1–18) served as another narrative demonstration for his audience. In contrast to the blessings given in Balaam's oracles, it demonstrated the complete failure of the first generation just prior to the census of the second generation (ch. 26), thus assuring the audience of Yahweh's blessings despite disobedience. The first generation served as a censurable example for the audience to avoid. Yahweh's command to kill the idolaters (25:4) was a repetition of previous commands (Exod 22:20; Lev 20:5), and Phineas serves as a praiseworthy example for killing the idolatrous couple (25:8). He followed in the line of his zealous ancestry: Levi who avenged Dinah's rape at Shechem and the Levites who killed 3,000 following the golden calf incident.[83] Employing the

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bless you will be blessed, and they who curse you will be cursed" (24:9) as compared to וַאֲבָרֲכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר, "And I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse" (Gen 12:3; also Gen 27:29). Also, לֹא־יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיהוּדָה, "and a scepter will rise from Israel" (24:17) as compared to וְקָם שֵׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Gen 49:10). See other similarities and allusions as identified by James Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 253–273, and Gary E. Schnittjer, "The Blessing of Judah As Generative Expectation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177, no. 705 (2020): 15–39.

[78] Schnittjer, "The Blessing of Judah As Generative Expectation," *BSac* 177, no. 705 (2020): 22.

[79] In the first oracle, Balak is the "king of Moab" (23:7). In the second, he is the "son of Zippor" (23:18). In the third and fourth, he is not even mentioned. See Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 366.

[80] Alluding to the striking of the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. Moab then, is pictured here as a serpent seed nation.

[81] "[The star of Jacob] … will crush the foreheads of Moab and destroy all the children of Seth. Edom will be a captive; Seir, its enemies, will be a captive" (24:17). Balaam also foretold the destruction of the Amalekites (24:20), the Kenites (24:21–22), and Ashur and Eber (24:23–24). The Kenites were among the nations possessing land promised to Abraham (Gen 15:19). The Israelites had already defeated the Amalekites once before (Exod 17:8–16) and would later repeat the victory under Saul (1 Sam 30), although not to the point of wiping them out, as Haman is linked to Agag, the Amalekite king that Saul spared (Esth 3:1).

[82] Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 367.

[83] Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 377–78.

epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame, Moses wanted his audience to avoid the idolatry of the first generation and follow the example of Phineas if they did find any idolaters. Moses used a pun as the immoral Israelite man took the Midianite woman into the קֻבָּה, the inner room of the tent, and then Phineas speared them in the קֵבָה, "stomach" or "inner / private parts."[84] The eternal priestly covenant (25:10–13) also serves Moses' purposes of distinguishing the priestly line.

Thus, this section of the narrative demonstrating Yahweh's faithfulness despite disobedience (20:1–25:18) revealed how the rebellion of the Israelites, including Moses and Aaron, did not abrogate Yahweh's promises to Abraham for Israel. The nation would still carry the promise and be a blessing to all nations, and those who cursed them would themselves be cursed (Gen 12:3). Moses' rhetoric of praise and blame emphasized the blameworthiness of various examples, and judicially, he intended the second generation to condemn such censurable examples and determine to avoid the same rebellious attitudes and actions. Instead, they should respond by trusting him as he leads them into the Promised Land. In these ways, this section contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

In the **preparation of the second generation (26:1–36:13)**, Moses' portrayal of the passing of his and Aaron's leadership to, respectively, Joshua and Aaron's sons, legitimized their authority and indicated to the audience (the second generation) whom they should follow and obey as they enter Canaan. Moses' second generation audience had replaced the first generation of Israelites, and his regulations for living in the land described how they were to live faithfully according to Yahweh's Law once they possessed the Promised Land.

Because the first generation of Israelites (numbered in chs. 1–4) were condemned to die in the wilderness (14:29, 32), only the second generation would enter the Promised Land. The **census of the second generation (26:1–65)** demonstrated that the second generation of Israelites had replaced the first (26:64–65). As shown in Table 3 below, the total number of second generation Israelites is very similar to the first. Thus, Moses' audience could know that they had replaced their parents' generation and would go into the Promised Land in their place. The tribal counts had significance for the audience because land would be divided amongst them according to the size of their population. That Judah was largest of the twelve tribes, and carrier of the promise (Gen 49:8–12) would give the tribe the place of preeminence among the twelve. The distinct counting method for the Levites (26:62) also served Moses' purpose of differentiating the Levites from the rest of the tribes.

Table 3: First and Second Census Compared

Tribe	First Census	Second Census
Reuben	46,500	43,730
Simeon	59,300	22,200
Gad	45,650	40,500
Judah	74,600	76,500
Issachar	54,400	64,300

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[84] Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 371.

Zebulun	57,400	60,500
Ephraim	40,500	52,700
Manasseh	32,200	32,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600
Dan	62,700	64,400
Asher	41,500	53,400
Naphtali	53,400	45,400
Total	603,550	601,730
Levi	22,000	23,000

With his **regulations for the Promised Land (27:1–30:16)**, Moses provided various narrative examples and direct commands to govern the Israelites' affairs once they entered the Promised Land. For example, the narrative of the daughters of Zelophehad (27:1–7), served as the case example that became law for Moses' audience to follow regarding inheritance for daughters (27:8–11).

Moses' second generation audience were eyewitnesses to the commissioning of Joshua (27:12–23), an act which acknowledged the divinely ordained transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua. The laying of hands on Joshua (27:18) before the entire assembly (27:19) meant the Israelites could know with certainty that they should follow Joshua's commands (27:21), and also that he had the means—Eleazar the priest, and the Urim—of determining Yahweh's will (27:21). Moses' regulations for offerings and feasts (28:1–29:40) and vows (30:1–16) identify for his audience how they should behave once they settled in the Promised Land.

The **defeat of the Midianites (31:1–54)** and miraculous preservation of all the Israelite soldiers (31:49) served as a narrative demonstration to the audience (who also lived through these events) that obedience to Yahweh's commands through his divinely ordained leader—in this case, Moses—brought victory over Israel's enemies.[85] Since Levites did not participate in the military, the example of sharing of spoils with the Levites and priests (31:29–30) served as the pattern for future Israelite victories.

The narrative account of the **Transjordan tribes (32:1–42)** functioned to show the sinfulness of Israelites desiring to stay outside the land promised to them by Yahweh. Moses compared the first generation's rebellion at Kadesh Barnea with the desire of the Transjordan tribes to stay outside the Promised Land (32:6–13). Just as the Israelites counted in the first census rebelled at Kadesh Barnea (ch. 14), now also the second generation counted by census rebelled.[86] Moses thus employed ethical rhetoric in identifying the censurable example of the Transjordan tribes, and he intended his audience to recognize the importance of the relationship between the people of Israel and the land of Israel—the two belong together. This narrative

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[85] The Midianites had sent their women to seduce the Israelites into worshiping Baal Peor at Shittim (Num 25).

[86] The language in 32:14–15 is especially sharp: "Behold, you stand in the place of your fathers, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more Yahweh's fierce anger against Israel. If you turn from following him, he will again abandon them in the wilderness, and you would have destroyed all these people."

account would also explain for future generations why the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh lived beyond the Jordan.

The **travelogue of Israel (33:1–49)** served to demonstrate for Moses' second generation Israelite audience how at Yahweh's command (33:2), the nation had come from Egypt to the plains of Moab where the original audience was physically located at the time of writing (33:48–49), on the verge of crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. Thus, the movements of the nation over the forty years[87] occurred exactly as Yahweh had (1) foretold, (2) commanded, and (3) superintended. The audience could therefore trust Yahweh's leading in the next phase of their journey into the Promised Land.

Having described the journey to the plains of Moab (33:1–49), Moses then explained further **regulations for the Promised Land (33:50–36:13)**. That the travelogue placed the Israelites at the plains of Moab and "These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho" (36:13), the "commands and regulations" refer to everything from 33:50–36:12. It covered topics such as the geographical borders of Israel (34:1–15), the men tasked with assigning the inheritance of land to the tribes (34:16–29), cities for Levites (35:1–5), cities of refuge (35:6–34),[88] and issues of tribal intermarriage and inheritance (36:1–9). All these commands govern how Moses' audience were to conduct themselves once they moved into the Promised Land.

Thus, the entire section governing the second generation (26:1–36:13) prepared them for entry into Canaan, the Promised Land. The census revealed how the second generation had now replaced the first. Eleazar replaced his father Aaron, and Joshua was commissioned to succeed Moses. Moses intended the second generation to follow these divinely appointed leaders, and to avoid the rebellious attitudes exhibited by the Transjordan tribes (censurable examples). Military victories demonstrated Yahweh's faithfulness to the nation. Other direct instruction identified how the Israelites should live once in the Promised Land. In these ways, this section contributed to Moses' overall deliberative purpose that the second generation Israelites would (1) obey the divinely appointed leaders of Israel, (2) fearlessly follow Joshua in conquering the land of Canaan, and (3) know how to live once they settled in the Promised Land so they could fulfill their obligations to Yahweh and to the Gentiles as a kingdom of priests and holy nation.

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[87] Calculated by the dates in 33:3 and 33:38.

[88] The commands for cities of refuge include regulations regarding how to deal with murderers of various types.

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