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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Numbers

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE FOURTH BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED

NUMBERS

The titles of the five books of Moses, which we use in our Bibles, are all borrowed from the Greek translation of the Seventy, the most ancient version of the Old Testament that we know of. But the title of this book only we turn into English; in all the rest we retain the Greek word itself, for which difference I know no reason but that the Latin translators have generally done the same. Otherwise this book might as well have been called *Arithmoi*, the Greek title, as the first *Genesis*, and the second *Exodus*; or these might as well have been translated, and called, the first the *Generation*, or *Original*, the second the *Out-let*, or *Escape*, as this *Numbers*. — This book was thus entitled because of the numbers of the children of Israel, so often mentioned in this book, and so well worthy to give a title to it, because it was the remarkable accomplishment of God's promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. It also relates to two numberings of them, one at mount Sinai (Numbers 1), the other in the plains of Moab, thirty-nine years after (Numbers 26). And not three men the same in the last account that were in the first. The book is almost equally divided between histories and laws, intermixed.

We have here,

I. The histories of the numbering and marshalling of the tribes (Numbers 1-4), the dedication of the altar and Levites (Numbers 7, 8), their march (Numbers 9, 10), their murmuring and unbelief, for which they were sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 11-14), the rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16, 17), the history of the last year of the forty (Numbers 20-26), the conquest of Midian, and the settlement of the two tribes (Numbers 31, 32), with an account of their journeys (Numbers 33),

II. Divers laws about the Nazarites, etc. (Numbers 5, 6); and again about the priests' charge, etc. (Numbers 18, 19), feasts (Numbers 28, 29), and vows (Numbers 30), and relating to their settlement in Canaan (Numbers 27, 34, 35, 36). An abstract of much of this book we have in a few words in ^{<950>}Psalm 95:10, *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation;* and an application of it to ourselves in ^{<500>}Hebrews 4:1, *Let us fear lest we seem to come short.* Many considerable nations there were now in being, that dwelt in cities and fortified towns, of which no notice is taken, no account kept, by the sacred history: but very exact records are kept of the affairs of a handful of people, that dwelt in tents, and wandered strangely in a wilderness, because they were the children of the covenant. *For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.*