

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 12
Numbers 1-25

Key Concepts: The key concept in this first section of Numbers is that God, while being true to the covenant, will discipline the people when they act in ways that put the promise of the restoration of creation at risk. We need to continue to remember that God has a long term plan for humanity and will allow no one to derail it. So God's "ill-humor" in these stories is not because God is always angry, but because the actions of the people are detrimental to themselves and to all of humanity.

Stories: We begin with a census of the tribes (1), the arrangement of the tribes around the tabernacle (2), the setting-apart of the Levites for special service (3), another census of the Levites (4), a variety of instructions to the people (5-6:21), the Aaronic benediction (6:22ff), the giving of offerings by the Tribal leaders (7), the consecration of the Levites (8), more instructions (9-10:10), Israel finally moves (10:11-36), the people begin to complain (11), Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses (12), the spying out of the land (13), the people want to return to Egypt and God decides to let them perish in the wilderness (14), more religious regulations (15), another revolt against Moses (16), Aaron's budding rod (17), priestly responsibilities divided up (18), more rites and rituals (19), wandering in Kadesh and the death of Aaron (20), a series of battles (21), Balak and Balaam stories (22-24), and more evil from the people (25)

Brief Summary: In this tale we watch several important events unfold.

We watch a census be taken which should have been a reminder to the people that God had blessed and multiplied them. They were a great people (as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore). In other words they were, especially with God's help, a force to be reckoned with. Yet as the stories show, they continued to act like slaves; afraid to risk. This results in their refusal to enter the Promised Land.

We watch the circular arrangement of the tribes of Israel in the camp at the center of which was the Tabernacle (God was in the midst of them). This arrangement was also a reminder that all of the tribes had a place at the table, so to speak. While Judah, the largest tribe, had a better place, they were not inherently superior to any other tribe. In this way God made clear that God does not play favorites.

We watch the rise of the Levites. The Levites were those who stood with Moses during the golden calf incident. For this reason God gives them a unique role in the religious life of the people. While not priests like Aaron and his sons, they perform religious duties at the Tabernacle. In addition they serve as a dedicatory replacement for the first born of every tribe who were to be dedicated to God.

We watch the disintegration of the people from a faithful community. There are several instances of rebellion against Moses. People want to elect new leaders to lead them back to Egypt, Aaron and Miriam are jealous of Moses and so try to push him out and two men try and usurp Moses' leadership position. We also witness the people inter-marry with foreigners, which was forbidden by God. In a sense this first section of Numbers is the bottoming out of the people in the wilderness.

Finally we watch Moses continually intervene on behalf of the people. While Moses was not happy with the rebellions he faced, he continually interceded for the people when God threatened to destroy them. This intercession and God's faithfulness to God's promises allow the people to continue on their journey toward the Promised Land even if Aaron and Moses will not cross over with them.

1. Does your faith community have persons who serve in the same sort of role as the Levites?
2. Where have you watched your faith community fail to take the risks necessary to follow God? Or where have they been bold?
3. What is your take on interreligious marriage today in light of the Numbers story?