

Week 13

Numbers - במדבר¹

Bemidbar – In the wilderness

Numbers is the 4th book of the Torah. Yes, we skipped the 3rd book for a bit, simply because I wanted bring a little closure to the Exodus story. Leviticus will work better closer to holy week anyway. You highly ordered souls will survive.

I always assumed the last four books that make up the Torah were dreadfully dull – *au contraire mon ami*. Numbers is one of the best Biblical or secular studies in leadership out there. Moses is up there with Heifetz and Linsky, or Pozner and Kouzes when it comes to teaching leadership. Reading Numbers alongside *Leadership on the Line* would be fascinating.

Numbers is a book...

[on failure](#) – as it has been said by countless preachers it was easier to get the Hebrews out of Egypt, than it was to get Egypt out of the Hebrews.

[on leadership](#) – we have everything from the power of delegation, the importance of a social compact, classic examples of the challenge of adaptive change, and a very active and present God

[on God's provision, patience and faithfulness](#) - God is just as active in this book as he was in Exodus

[on faith](#) – trusting in God to provide and guide is the constant teaching of Numbers

Sunday, Jan 16

Numbers 9 – The Lord spoke...²

For Reflection: This chapter is about remembering and following.³ ***What, in your family, is essential to remember? How do you identify God's presence in your midst? What do you look for?***

Lagniappe: John 16:13

¹ Do you know why the footnote number is at the start of the word??? It's not! That footnote number is really at the end of the word – you guessed it - Hebrew reads right to left. In English, the book gets its name from the two census' in the book (chapters 1 & 26) there are actually more the Levites get their own census in chapters 4 & 5. I am thinking that they were hard core into genealogy. What dull material to entitle a rather interesting leadership book after. Be-mid-bar (the Hebrew name for the book) is significantly more inspired – *In the wilderness*. It's actually the 4th word in the book of Numbers, not the first. If you don't know what I'm talking about go back to week 11 footnote 27

² Leviticus and Numbers are marked by a repeating phrase, "The LORD spoke to Moses saying..." This phrase comes up just shy of 100 times in those two books. Let's hope we too hear the LORD speak. Are you ready?

³ When I read about the cloud over the tabernacle I think of that volcano exploding near Tonga with all the lightning. The NY Times reported over 400,000 strikes in the 12 hours after the eruption – with 60,000 in the first 15 minutes. Some may say I am letting my imagination run riot here, but I figure there was a reason the Hebrews were hesitant about going into the presence of God.

- Monday, Jan 17** Numbers 11 - What have you done for me lately?⁴
For Reflection: Anger, Prayer, Provision. *Can you believe in a God whose anger can be kindled?*⁵ I love the beginning of verse 20 (when I get exasperated, it's good to know God does too), but hate how it ends. *What is the Egypt you long to go back to?*
Lagniappe: Exodus 16
- Tuesday, Jan 18** Numbers 13 – Epic Fail
For Reflection: *In what situations do you struggle with feeling like a grasshopper? Who is the Caleb in your life? When has fear ever helped you?* In this chapter fear has the effect of minimizing their God, and magnifying their enemies.
Lagniappe: Romans 8:35-37
- Wednesday, Jan 19** Numbers 14 – From Bad to Worse
For Reflection: Fear now creates panic (14:1) a spirit of complaint (14:2) rebellion (14:4) mob violence (14:10) all in a few hours. They have completely forgotten God tends to take these sins personally (cf 11:1). *When has fear taken you down an unhealthy path? When have you been like Moses, Aaron, Joshua or Caleb fighting fear?*
Lagniappe: 1 John 4:18
- Thursday, Jan 20** Numbers 20 – When Leaders “Lose It”
For Reflection: This occurs forty years after the Passover. Understanding the sin of Moses is hard, lots of different opinions out there. My view is he touched the glory, that is took credit for what God did. *What is a strength of yours that can easily become a weakness? Do you have a Meribah event in your life?*
Lagniappe: Deuteronomy 4:23-29, Acts 12:21-23 (yikes!)⁶
- Friday, Jan 21** Numbers 21 – Still Complaining!
For Reflection: verse 5 continues a painful theme. If you are a leader, you will be spoken against, it just happens. It's the hardest part, just making your peace with the fact that people will say stuff. *What bumps and bruises have you experienced as a leader?* (if you have a circle of influence at all – you are a leader)
Lagniappe: Matthew 5:10-12

⁴ Complaint was incessant in the wilderness, just as it is with us in our wildernesses. See Exodus 16/17 32/33; Leviticus 10/24; Numbers 11/12/13/14/16/17/20/21/25/32.

⁵ Most people can't believe in a God who would express anger, it seems awful convenient to worship a fully domesticated God. A new idolatry. The Son of God had anger issues too, it's not just an OT thing.

⁶ This passage was used at my ordination for the charge to the newly ordained pastor (me) by the Rev. Carl Eaton. I loved Carl, his words scared me straight.

Saturday, Jan 22

Numbers 27 – Gutsy Women and Worthy Men

For Reflection: Given the culture this is just an amazing story of courage and wisdom – resulting in remarkably liberal view of inheritance law. ***What do you admire about these women, Moses' actions, and your God? Who is your Joshua? Who will fill your role in your family, church or community?***

Lagniappe: Galatians 3:28, 2 Timothy 4:1-5