

18-19 Bible Study # 26

3/26/19

Numbers

Books Referenced in Today's Class

- *The Faith Explained* by Leo J. Trese
- *In Conversation with God* by Francis Fernandez

Numbers

- **Numbers 1**

- Here the author provided some chronology to help us keep track of how long it had been since the people of Israel left *Egypt*
 - They built the tabernacle in the **first month** of the **second year** (**Exodus 40**)
 - This section begins on the **first day** of the **second month** in the **second year** (since they left Egypt) while they are with the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness (Mount Sinai)
 - Basically, this is one month since they began operating out of the Tent of Meeting *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 1:2-3**

- They were told to take a census (count) of all the men 20 years old and older who were able to “go forth to war”
- This is why the book is called the **Book of Numbers**
- The *Hebrew* name for this book was the **Book of the Wilderness** because it begins with the words: “*The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness*”
- Also, the majority of the book is about the 40 year wilderness journey

Numbers (Cont)

- Unfortunately, because it is called the **Book of Numbers**, many think that it is only about listing the numbers of people within each tribe
- Often people begin reading the 1st chapter and give up
- In this section, we are told the number of guys who could swing a sword in each of the 12 tribes *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 1:44-54**

- The total number of these men was **603,550**
- This was **3,550** more than we saw in **Exodus 12** when Israel left Egypt (**600,000** men plus women and children)
- Either this is a more accurate count, or it simply reflects the additional number of 20 year olds added in the two years since they left *Egypt*
- It should also be noted that the tribe of *Levi* was not counted among the warriors *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 2:1-4**

- Also, note that the tribe of *Judah* was the leading tribe, so it was given the most important location within the camp
- They got to park right next to the front gate of the tabernacle (after Moses and *Aaron*)
- *St. Ephraim the Syrian* suggested that when *Israel* set up their camp or marched across the desert, they formed a cross, blessing the land as they went

Numbers (Cont)

- The *Levites* were encamped in the inner circle protecting the tabernacle, while the rest of the tribes branched out from there
- It may have been a bit more chaotic than these pictures depict, but it depended on how one read the description of the camp
- But, of great importance, was the cardinal directions of the tribal arrangements
- The emphasis was on the **Eastern Gate** of the Tent of Meeting

Numbers (Cont)

- The entrance to the Tent of Meeting (and later the temple) always faced **East** in order for the people to move to the west when they entered the presence of the Lord
- Father Sebastian explained this by pointing out that:
 - The Garden of Eden had the same arrangement with an eastern gate where Adam and Eve went in and out
 - Abraham traveled west to go to the Promised Land
 - To go east in the Pentateuch was always to go away from the presence of the Lord

Numbers (Cont)

- On the other hand, Christian churches have always been built facing east
- This was so that everyone, including the priest, faced east in prayer for two reasons:
 - First, churches were built according to the early church tradition which came from the post-exilic period when the people were waiting for the Messiah, the glory cloud, and the ark of the covenant to return to the temple from the east
 - We saw in **Ezekiel 9** and **10** that the glory cloud left the temple heading east to the Mount of Olives by the eastern gate
 - **Ezekiel 43** predicted that when the temple was rebuilt the glory cloud would return from the east (although this never happened)

Numbers (Cont)

- Also, the Essene community located itself by the Dead Sea so that they would be the first to see the return of the glory cloud from the east
- Second, Jesus ascended (and we believe will return) from the top of the Mount of Olives which was located east of Jerusalem
- We often hear in the liturgy that we are gathered together in worship as we await the great eschatological return of Jesus
- This of course is what we are doing liturgically in the Mass
- This should help us realize just how important some of the Old Testament events relate to our modern liturgy *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 3:1-4**

- Here we are introduced to the genealogy of *Levi*, which was initially introduced in **Exodus 6:14-25**
- At that time Father suggested that we pay special attention to the three families of Levi:
 - Gershon
 - Merari
 - **Kohath** – Aaron and Moses
- In this section, we see a return to the genealogy of Levi with *Aaron* and his sons from whom all the priests will come:
 - Abihu – died in the tabernacle for using “unholy fire”
 - Nadab – died in the tabernacle for using “unholy fire”
 - Eleazar – served as a priest during the life of Aaron
 - Ithamar – served as a priest during the life of Aaron *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 3:5-10**

- Father pointed out two important words in this passage that were used in the *Garden of Eden* story when *Adam* was tasked to care for the garden:
 - **Charge** and **Minister**
 - To guard or protect (*shamar*) and to serve or care for (*abad*)
 - They both mean to protect and serve or till and keep the garden
 - It is obviously that their use in this passage was not by accident or a coincidence

Numbers (Cont)

- It meant that the Levites who were in the presence of the Lord and were also to minister to Him
- This was about God and man working together again
- It was about reestablishing the Garden of Eden relationship
- It was about this new mission for the Levites *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 3:11-15**

- This is the definitive passage that established the Levitical priesthood over the firstborn priesthood who had been set apart in **Exodus 13:1** where God said that since He saved them from death they (the firstborn) were to be dedicated to Him
- The firstborn sons of Israel had been called from among the people, saved from death, for the people, to be with God
- They were initially given the special mission of the priesthood

Numbers (Cont)

- We saw this play out again in **Exodus 19** and **24** where young men from every tribe were sacrificing to the Lord on 12 pillars
- Some of the Fathers of the Church saw this reference as a link back to **Exodus 13** where the firstborn sons were set apart for the priestly ministry
- At this point, the firstborn were forbidden from taking care of the tabernacle as this job was transferred to Aaron and his sons

Numbers (Cont)

- Thus, the job of *Aaron* and his sons was to take care of the inner workings of the tabernacle
- **Exodus 29** and 30 laid out the daily activities within the tabernacle
- But, we saw other priests (most likely the firstborn sons) offering sacrifices in **Exodus 19**
- From this, it would appear that the firstborn priesthood was replaced by the Levitical priesthood as a result of the Golden Calf incident

Numbers (Cont)

- This may have also happened because the firstborn priesthood abused their rights
- If we look back at the fertility cults, it was the firstborn sons who were considered to be the most fertile and therefore, most likely, to have been involved in the Golden Calf incident
- Hopefully, this will help explain the change in the priesthood
- We will see this arise again in the *Korah Rebellion* *

Numbers (Cont)

- **Numbers 3:16-39**

- Here, we find a list of the sons of each family beginning with *Gershon* along with the jobs associated with each family
- The *Kohathites* got the sacred jobs because they were in the priestly line
- The other families had tasks related to the set up and taking down of the tabernacle

- **Numbers 3:40-51**

- Here, we are given information concerning the priesthood of the “firstborn” being replaced by the Levitical priesthood

Numbers (Cont)

- This section also depicts the cardinal direction of each family's location within the encampment
- The most sacred location was nearest the eastern gate
- *Moses* and *Aaron* and his sons encamped right in front of that gate
- Then came the tribes by importance with *Judah* just beyond the tents of *Moses* and *Aaron* *