

Sermon Notes: March 10, 2024

Focus: Calves, Snakes and Jesus

All Readings

In The Wilderness the title of the Book of Numbers is alternately titled *In The Wilderness*. Moses hears God telling him to make a bronze snake to be lifted high above the people for healing. Moses did this because his followers had been complaining about the indignities of being in the desert so long. The grumbling provoked God to send venomous snakes into the camp.

*Exodus's golden calf: bad | Snakes in the camp: very bad
Numbers' bronze snake on a pole: good healing*

The calf (not the serpent) was a rebuke of Moses' authority. On the other hand, the bronze serpent attached to the pole was a confirmation of Moses' healing power. To make today's readings even more weird, just add some Jesus.

John 3:14-15 *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life*

Golden Calf In the book of Exodus, Moses was spending way too much time hanging out with God on a mountain, and the people wanted answers *now*. The people used the golden calf as an excuse: *We, not God, led ourselves out of Egypt.* So, Aaron made a golden calf, presented it, and saw how much the people liked it. He even got inspired to make an altar to it *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"* (Exodus 32:4)

Bronze Serpent God tells the desert journeyers that if they don't like their trip, just wait it will get worse...with vipers:

Numbers 21 *The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.*

EMT's Moses' bronze serpent is part of our world too. To the right is a uniform image worn by Emergency Medical Techs.



Numbers Overview Broadly think of Numbers as three wilderness stories with two travel logs gluing them together.

- 1st wilderness section - chapters 1-10 –
 - Sinai (Moses came down from Sinai with 10 Commandments)
 - In this section, we have the first count of the people and listing of all the regiments of the tribes who will protect the community.
- Two chapters of travel to get to Paran (an inhospitable stopping point)
- 2nd wilderness section - chapters 13-19—
 - They could have entered the promised land quickly, but they chose to shrink in fear.
- Two more chapters of travel to get to Moab
- 3rd wilderness section – Moab is the biggest section – chapters 22 – 36 –
 - Includes the second census. There are instructions about how to settle in Cana. The book ends with a new generation on the verge of entering the Promised Land

Where do you center your life? The Hebrews are constantly moving around, but when they make camp, God's presence is at the center. Priests and Levites surround this presence. Then all the other tribes fan out from that center. *What is at the center of our lives?* I am praying that day after day we can keep the presence of God at the center.

Jesus as healer Jesus refers to himself as the healer on a cross in John 3. The poison of our life can be healed if we look to him who was lifted high.

Snakes: bad, unless on a pole | *Jesus: good*

Jesus' cross: even better and like the bronze serpent healer

How do you see God? Life is going to bite us in the ankle, and we need somewhere to look besides down. If you feel that your life is full of too much poison or you've been marching in circles too long, there is Jesus. He is the one who heals when we look to him. Let's look up to Jesus on the cross who is like the bronze serpent. So, when life stings and poisons you, look up.

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