

Bible Study Lesson Summary, June 7, 2020

Today's lesson includes Days 82-88 on your reading guide.

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Num. 28 & 29: This is mostly a repeat of Lev. 23. Each gives a slightly different version of how to celebrate the holydays. These are not holidays. They are all about how to thank God. The question that has been asked in the discussion of chapters like these is where all the animals come from to do these sacrifices. I don't know for sure but one explanation is that this information was being passed on by oral tradition long before it was written on scrolls. With the oral tradition there seems to be a problem keeping the timeline straight. At this point in the narrative the Israelites are very close to the Promised Land. This is no longer just desert they are in. They have grown and they are a force of people to be worried about by the kings around them. One scholar taught that they became mercenaries and fought for different kings and got paid or threatened people and they paid them off in livestock. Having them grow strong as a nation was a part of God's plan in keeping them in the desert for 40 years. But these holiday policies fit with their life in the Promised Land better than when they were in the desert. The other question that comes up with these chapters is how out of place they seem. It is like a scroll from Leviticus got placed in Numbers by mistake.

Num. 30: One of the possible grounds for an annulment in the Church is lack of maturity or ability to make a vow. This chapter looks at this issue in terms of the vows of women, which is important for women who have no rights apart from the man in their life. So a husband or a father can countermand the vow of a woman. This is again an important reason that Mary had John to look after her after the death of Jesus.

Num. 31: Okay, now we are back to the story of Balaam. This is why we think a scroll got mixed in. In vs. 8 we find out that Balaam is killed along with Midianite kings. In vs. 16 we find out that the Israelites did not kill the Midianite women. Here is why: "Why, they are the very ones who on Balaam's advice prompted the unfaithfulness of the Israelites toward the Lord in the Peor affair (Num.25), which began the slaughter of the Lord's community." Booty and tax is figured in vs. 40, "and sixteen thousand persons, of whom thirty-two fell as tax to the Lord." I presume that these were slaves and were considered property. Vs. 34, part of the booty was 32,000 girls who were virgins. If they had not been slaves, they would have been killed. This is OT slavery, which I don't believe the Israelites would have had in the time of Jesus. St. Paul didn't condemn slavery but gave slaves a different status than this part of the Bible, for it was wartime.

Num. 32: The tribes of Gad and Reuben ask to claim the land they are already in rather than waiting for a portion of the land across the Jordan River. Moses agrees with this as long as they help fight in the upcoming battles when they do cross the river.

Num. 33: They even kept a log of where they had camped on their journey through the desert. Vs. 39 mentions that Aaron was 123 when he died. Even if this is not numerically accurate I'm sure he felt that old after all they had gone through.

Vs. 55-56, "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those whom you allow to remain will become as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will harass you in the country where you live, and I will treat you as I had intended to treat them."

Num. 34: Moses is told by God how to divide out the Promised Land to each remaining tribe. He even appoints supervisors, kind of like bishops of different dioceses.

Num. 35: Since the Levites work on a different basis than the other tribes, they do not get an area of land but are given specific cities throughout the territory so they can do their priestly work. This is like giving each priest a parish that is not something they own but are given a house to live in, within that parish.

In vs. 9-15 God sets up asylum cities. This is close but still different than penal colonies. Vs. 15, "These six cities of asylum shall serve not only the Israelites but all the resident or transient aliens among them so that anyone who has killed another unintentionally may take refuge there." This may sound strange but these are warriors who are taking possession of a land that was inhabited by enemies. They would probably be a little tense for a few years. Someone who entered a house without knocking effectively could surprise the owner and get killed. Think of our Post Traumatic Stress disorders.

Num. 36: With the division of the land, tribe by tribe, an immediate problem would be intermarriage between tribes. This chapter takes care of that. It also takes care of all the widows which exist because of all the battles.

DUETERONOMY

(By the time you are finished with this book you will realize why so many people give up the quest to read the whole Bible by going from the beginning to the end. Hang in there. As you will notice in the introduction to the book, it was written after the people had been in the Promised Land for centuries. It is a kind of tribute to Moses, describing what he did in the last 40 days before he died and the people entered the Holy Land. It is like the way the Gospels describe the last three years of the life of Jesus because of their critical nature.)

Dt. 1: This book repeats much of the last books. This chapter includes the appointment of more judges to help Moses with the leadership responsibilities and God's response to threats of a revolt. It also repeats the story of the scouting of the Promised Land and how the scouts, except Caleb, turned against God and the consequences. (Num. 13-14)

Dt. 2: Vs. 5 lets us know that even though God had not chosen Esau, that He had not forgotten him or his children. Vs. 9 lets us know that God is also taking care of the descendants of Lot. So understand that being chosen by God for His messages, like the Israelites were, does not limit salvation.

Dt. 3: This repeats the defeat of King Sihon and King Og, Vs. 23-27 show how the Lord would not change His mind about Moses going into the Promised Land. During the Agony in the Garden Jesus said, "Thy will be done." Moses, a Jesus figure, asked God about changing the plans but had to go with God's will, just as Jesus did.

Dt. 4:1-24: This is a long version of my Dad's line, "Do what I tell you and you will live." Vs. 24, "For the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Notice that this concept of fidelity is not primarily likened to a fidelity to a spouse but to a king. Lack of fidelity to a king is treason which is punishable by death.

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 83: This psalm is not about peace. Vs. 16, "Pursue them with your tempest; terrify them with your storm." I don't know all the places mentioned like in vs. 10-11 but Midian we have just read about and remember that Moses escaped to Midian and found his first wife there after leaving Egypt at age 40 (Ex. 2) Endor is the area of Megiddo that was wiped out many times. This is partly why people don't think the OT is like the NT because so many places are wiped out but the only difference is really that Jesus did not kill but warned constantly of Hell. If this is truly a prayer of Jesus we have to ask whether He was kidding around when He said the road to heaven was narrow and hard.

Psalm 84: This is a perfect prayer for Jesus (vs. 10, "look upon the face of your anointed."), as He was being tempted by the Satan. Satan was tempting Him with earthly kingdoms and He was focusing on the heavenly kingdom. Vs. 11, "Better one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. Better the threshold of the house of my God than a home in the tents of the wicked."

Psalm 85: In this psalm Jesus is once more standing for His people (His Body, the Church) and praying for mercy. Vs. 11 is about the balance between justice and peace, or God's vengeance and mercy.

Psalm 86: This is a prayer of Jesus during His Passion and trusting in the Resurrection. In vs. 13, "your love for me is great; you have rescued me from the depths of Sheol." In Peter 3:18-20 we read that: "Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient..." The end of vs. 16 ("save this child of your handmaid.") foretells Mary, who called herself the "handmaid of the Lord." (Lk 1:38)

Psalm 87: This psalm was written to be an acknowledgement of how the Lord brought the Chosen People back together in Zion after they had taken as slaves to other countries (vs. 4, "From Babylon and Egypt I count those who acknowledge the Lord. Philistia, Ethiopia, Tyre, of

them it can be said: “This one was born there.”” This diaspora, or dispersion, happened way after King David. But now comes the Church and the new birth of Baptism for peoples of all these nations. They become a part of the new Zion, heaven. Vs. 5, “But of Zion it must be said: “They all were born here.” We are reborn for heaven.

Psalm 88: This is a prayer of Jesus on the cross as He comes close to death. As the Eternal Son of God, He has taken all our sins upon himself, so now He is feeling rejected because of our sin. He feels the rejection and distance from God that we feel when in sin. Vs. 15, “Why do you reject me, Lord? Why hide your face from me?” Back in vs. 11 he says: “Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades arise and praise you?” Shades are those in Hades. In other words, what good am I if I am dead or in hell?

Psalm 89:1-18: This psalm is about the covenant of God with King David. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise, the King of Kings. Vs. 5, “I will make your dynasty stand forever and establish your throne though all ages.” This notion of the eternal dynasty is why the High Priests in Jesus’ time didn’t like the sign Pilate put on the cross, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. It meant more to them than it meant to Pilate.

Vs. 11 mentions Rahab, which would be the Boogie Man for people who feared the water, and/or sea monsters.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 17: In Thessalonica Paul made more converts, some prominent women. This is significant because Christianity gave woman more rights than any other system of government or religion. It gave them a dignity of their own. That in itself is a disturbance to the culture which would have made some people angry at Paul. By the way, slaves felt the same way, dignified by Jesus. In vs. 6, poor Jason pays a price for housing these missionaries. In Athens Paul preaches and in vs. 19 gets a chance to be officially heard in the Areopagus. This was the Greek version of a synagogue or more like the senate chambers. Vs. 32, Paul must not have convinced them all, “We should like to hear you on this some other time.”

Acts 18: In vs. 3 we find out that Aquila and Paul were both tentmakers. At the end of vs. 6 Paul says: “from now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Paul’s preaching in Corinth then became successful so God told him to stay. So he was there a year and a half.

Some Jews there took him to Gallio, the tribunal. Gallio was not impressed so they beat up Sosthenes, who had been allowing Paul to preach in the synagogue. Poor guy.

In Syria Antioch, Paul cuts his hair to make a Nazarite vow. Apollos was a poorly instructed convert from Judaism but he got corrected and did well.

Acts 19: This is a fun chapter. In vs. 6: “And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” This is Confirmation starting. Our notion of second class relics comes from vs. 12: “that when face cloths or aprons that touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.” Vs. 13-17 are shown why no one should try doing an exorcism except an appointed priest. The Church holds that the power to cast out demons is from the Apostles and handed on to bishops. An official exorcist is one that has been appointed by the Bishop. Even Protestant ministers realize this.

The last part of the chapter is about Demetrius who was losing business as a silversmith who made idols. Remember this is in Ephesus where Mary and John the Apostle eventually lived. Vs. 35 is fun: “know that the city of Ephesians is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image that fell from the sky.” They had a sacred meteor. Confirmation, naked exorcists, idol worship, meteors; this chapter has a lot of fun things. This is also a good time to remind people that things like Ouija boards and other simple things that are not from God are dangerous. They can bring in a nasty spirit that is hard to remove.

Acts 20: Vs. 7-12 is a reminder to priests about preaching too long. Eutychus fell asleep during a homily by Paul and fell out the window and died. Paul brought him back up to Mass, which lasted another six hours and the boy came back to life. In vs. 22 Paul continues talking about going to Jerusalem but that the Holy Spirit is warning him about the hardships ahead. Like Jesus, he does not avoid them. In vs. 26-27, “And so I solemnly declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God.” Priests are not here to make people happy but to preach the word accurately. After that the person is responsible for their own judgment.