

## READING NOTES – MARCH

### The One Year Bible (ESV)

#### MARCH 1

Welcome to March. If you have kept up, keep it going. Remember, it is more important to read your Bible than to read these notes. If you have a friend or two who will do this with you, it will help you to have the accountability. Then on the 17th you can meet together and celebrate your effort by eating something with corned beef and drinking some appropriate beverage. (For example, a McLeprechaun and a Shamrock Shake?)

#### **Leviticus 24:1-25:46**

Leviticus 24

Vs. 1-9 Along with the feasts and holy days, there were these two things mentioned. Although the emphasis has been on the yearly feasts, the people would remember too that each day, there were provisions being made for them that should lead to celebration.

I guess you don't have to be Einstein to figure out the symbolic nature of these. The light symbolized God's leading of the people and the *twelve loaves* symbolized His provision for the people. The people knew there were two things the Lord always provided for them. The one thing not mentioned here that also stood in the Holy Place was the altar of incense. This was probably to signify the prayers of the people constantly coming before God in gratitude for His provision symbolized on the other tables.

Notice that the people had to provide the oil for the lamps. I wonder where they got this oil in the wilderness. Maybe olive trees grow wildly, or maybe they bought it from merchant caravans. At this point they had been in the wilderness about a year, so I don't think they would have had a lot left over from Egypt. Since the people had to provide the oil, it might signify that they were grateful for the light that God gave them.

For us as disciples we don't have to bring olive oil or flour to the church for weekly symbolic ceremonies. God provides us with light and our daily provision and care. To receive God's light, all we have to do is come to Him and sit with Him and His Word. But therein lies the rub. Try to convince the average believer that they should sit for 20 minutes a day reading the Word and for 20 minutes praying and they will nod. Some may give a grunt of assent. But most will not do it. If you make this a requirement for leaders, you might have a mutiny or angry leaders. Most Christians are too busy to come to the light and sit quietly before the Lord. That cannot be the heart of a disciple. We don't bring a cow or lamb or oil. We bring ourselves, renounce everything and follow our Lord every day in the harvest. We all have busy lives, but how can we be too busy to spend time with the Lord? Read Luke 14:25-35.

Vs. 10-23 It seems to me that as Moses was writing this, on that day, this situation arose. It would be a case in point of obeying the commandments.

I don't think this guy said anything more than something you'd hear on TV or expect someone to say in a fight with emotions running high. God is a "good old boy" and just sort of shakes His head when we do this, right? Wrong. Here, God is stressing the point of His holiness among the people. They needed to remember (as we do) that He is always close and that He always hears this stuff.

Some interesting things here:

First, the man's father was an Egyptian. This might have had something to do with the lack of respect or the cause of the fight. Later we'll hear that the Egyptians who traveled with Israel created some discontent and rebellion that some people in Israel had to be punished for.

Second, the tribe of Dan is mentioned. In Judges, Dan will be the first tribe to fall into total idolatry. Probably for that reason, Dan is not listed among the tribes in the book of Revelation that compose the 144,000. This guy is the first person put to death for violating one of the Ten Commandments. And he is of the tribe of Dan. ☹

Third, the repetition of *for I am the Lord your God*.

Finally, the people did as the Lord commanded Moses. Obedience, for now.

Leviticus 25:1-46

Actually this will all flow into tomorrow's reading. This is an awesome chapter, in that what is commanded here was never, ever done in the land, not once. No king did it, not even David or Josiah. The amount of dependence on God that this required was more than anyone could humanly muster up.

If we were doing a Bible study, I'd ask you to break this chapter into two main divisions and then each division into two parts. That's just an exercise to help people see the flow of a chapter (and keep them awake).

The main division is after v. 17. Verses 1-17 give a general description of the Sabbath year and the year of jubilee, and vs. 18-55 give specifics as to how to deal with various situations that might arise.

Vs. 1-7 and 18-22 have to do with the Sabbatical year. Everything else has to do with the year of jubilee.

I won't make a lot of comments here. Your own observations will be better than anything I can say. Reading the verses on the Sabbatical year and particularly 18-22, you understand that if the people couldn't trust God for this, they would never trust Him for the year of jubilee.

Vs. 1-7 This is the Sabbath year. Verse 2 says this is the land that God gave them. In all of this talk about the land, notice to whom the land really belonged. Notice in v. 5 that no one could harvest or sell the grain or fruit. Everyone was free to go into any field and take what they needed for that day. If you understand this, it was a year off from field work with complete dependence and provision from God. To think that the entire nation was to do this is incredible. Who needs four weeks of vacation when every seven years you get a year off?

Vs. 8-12 This 50th year was the year of jubilee. It began on the Day of Atonement in the 49th year, which was also a Sabbatical year. This means that the 50th year was also a Sabbatical year; that is, they were given two years in a row in which they were not to work their fields. This time off from work was one reason it was called the year of jubilee. They were supposed to celebrate.

Vs. 13-17 If you understand this, the land in Israel never changed possession, but if a person needed to they could lease the land. This would always be measured from one year of jubilee to the other, estimating how many harvests would come until the land was given back.

Vs. 18-22 This information was given for the people to trust God for every Sabbatical year. He would provide enough in the sixth year to get them to the ninth year. If Israel had obeyed the Lord, they would have been the talk of all the nations. This would mean that when the Sabbatical year was followed by a year of jubilee, God would provide even more and the people would have to trust even more.

Vs. 23-34 These were regulations regarding the leasing of land with respect to the year of jubilee when it all had to be returned. You'll find one interesting exception in this. Notice how v. 23 sets the tone for these instructions. This reminds me of something I was reading this morning that Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 16:12, *And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*

Vs. 35-43 These regulations have to do with the poor people in Israel. They could become "indentured" servants until the year of jubilee.

Vs. 44-46 These slaves were real slaves. Those slaves who would belong to Israel were treated with a respect and with rights that no other nation gave their slaves. These rules were for Israel as a nation ruled by God. Eventually, Paul and the Spirit would say that people should not become slaves, thereby beginning the end of slavery.

In thinking of the Sabbatical year and the year of jubilee, any of us would have been deeply challenged to do what these people were asked to do. Thankfully, God no longer requires this. But, true obedience is always costly and radical. Being a follower of Christ in this harvest means a dependence on God and a willingness to give things up. Jesus is our sacrificial example. Because we hold on to things and see our security as coming from credit cards, jobs and people, I have a feeling that we're missing very obvious things related to the Great Commission and the harvest. Therefore, not as many prisoners and slaves of sin get set free.

### **Mark 10:13-31**

Vs. 13-16 Poor disciples. Where are all these kids coming from? This tells me that when Jesus taught or healed, the disciples did crowd control. The disciples had all these deeply needy people in lines like kids waiting to see Santa, and then these moms showed up. This "kid" situation seemed low priority to them. The kids weren't sick; they were just kids. They learned a lesson about needs and the value of simple wide-eyed faith and trust.

V. 15 is a very important verse, and we're about to see an example of the danger mentioned here.

Vs. 17-22 This is the rich young ruler.

Again, what great training for the disciples. You could have a class on "the dangers of riches and idolatry" and never get the point across like here. Here the Father is showing the disciples what happens when someone loses their childlike faith.

V. 20 Notice that this guy was serious and had lived a good life according to the requirements of the law.

V. 21 Somehow in this, Jesus actually communicated love so that Peter (Mark's source) noticed this. Jesus put His finger on this man's real god.

Vs. 23-31 Notice now that Jesus teaches the disciples from this incident that the Father arranged.

V. 24 Notice that the disciples fully understood Jesus and realized that salvation would be next to impossible if v. 23 were true. Notice that Jesus calls them *children*. Look back up to vs. 13-16. Very interesting.

V. 25 This is a sewing or surgical needle.

Vs. 26-27 Now if these verses are a true picture of the reality, then "stuff" really is a problem. Money is bigger than we think. Being saved and being disciples doesn't shield us from this temptation and influence any more than being a Christian keeps us from getting a cold. Our "treasure in heaven" determines how we use our time and how we focus our lives. It determines our faith. Are we so secure with our holdings in heaven, that we could pour out and "waste" our lives on earth for Christ, following Him in the harvest? The "acceptable" answer is "yes," but not many are doing it. Yeah, I feel bad, too; but that's why we're encouraging one another to go in the right direction together.

Vs. 28-31 Peter and the others had given up their careers to follow Jesus. This is why they were "children." In Jesus saying what He says here, He is speaking to all of us. We follow for other reasons, ready to spend our lives in the harvest. We don't follow to gain. We gained the minute we believed. Now we follow out of love and obedience. But, there is blessing. Note that Mark is

the one who mentions persecutions. Jesus warns them that the *first will be last*, etc., suggesting they may not always understand God's standard of fairness. We are simply to love and trust our Lord like children as we follow, making disciples, who make disciples. Do you see the connection back to verses Mark 10:13-16? Simple, childlike faith trusts and follows.

### **Psalm 44:9-26**

The sons of Korah were appointed by David to lead singing in the tabernacle in Jerusalem, but whenever a godly king arose, he always gathered the descendants of Korah and put them in charge of the worship of the temple. The only historical situation I can think of that would fit with the lament here is during the days of Hezekiah. At that time Assyria was taking all the surrounding nations captive, on their way to becoming a world power. As Assyria captured the northern kingdom of Israel and swept into Judea, taking villages captive and taking the people away as slaves, Assyria thought that God had turned His back on His people. It was through this hardship that godliness was shaped and strengthened in Judea and especially in Jerusalem where all the people ran for protection. The people were following a godly king, yet Judea was being defeated by their enemies.

Just like Job, God allowed these people to endure hardship to teach them something and to warn them. The prophets Hosea and Isaiah were used by God to convey this warning and Hezekiah and the people listened to the Lord.

Vs. 9-16 As we will soon be reading in Deuteronomy, the mark of God's blessing was that Israel would never have to turn their backs on their enemies and that they would be held in honor by their neighbors. Only sin would cause God to let Israel be humiliated. "Falling away" had been the history of Israel leading up to the historical events that gave birth to this psalm.

Vs. 17-22 Verse 17 was true in that a revival of faith was going on during the reign of King Hezekiah, but it was after years of drifting from God. The spirituality of the nation was paper thin and would be torn to shreds by Hezekiah's son, Manasseh.

V. 22 Paul quotes this verse in Romans 8 and ends it, *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*. In the context of Romans 8, we don't know why God does what He does, but we do know that God produces good **as He uses** those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. *For good* might be that we don't understand His purpose and die, but we trust that God knew what He was doing and used our death for His good plan.

Vs. 23-26 The Spirit is inspiring the writer to cry out to God. This is God's will for us when we don't understand. It is this holding to our faith and hope and looking to God that defeats the enemy. It is a power the enemy cannot understand or resist. Many Christians in many times and many countries have endured deep oppression and injustice and cried out to God. Their only victory was clinging to Christ and they won.

*And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* (Rev. 12:11)

### **Proverbs 10:20-21**

Just for fun, try to put these two Proverbs together: 20a and 21a / 20b and 21b.

## **MARCH 2**

### **Leviticus 25:47-27:13**

Although the subjects of these remaining chapters in Leviticus seem kind of random, you'll notice that the year of jubilee ties them together. These are rules of redemption of persons from servitude, and the redemption of vowed people or property is explained now in terms of the

special condition of the year of jubilee. Chapter 26 might seem out of place, until you notice the references to the Sabbatical year. This year is very connected to the year of jubilee. Not only was the Sabbatical year the way to determine the year of jubilee (7 Sabbatical years + 1), but it was the basis for gauging the faith and obedience of the people.

The weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical year were an incredible way to see if the leaders and people truly understood the love and power of God. If you didn't have faith in the Lord and understand His love, you didn't have the freedom of heart to rest on the Sabbath and celebrate Him. If you didn't have faith in the Lord and understand His love, thereby having the freedom of heart to rest on the Sabbath and celebrate Him, there was no way you would celebrate the Sabbatical year. How could you depend on God and celebrate Him for an entire year? If you didn't have this kind of faith and love and joy in God, the year of jubilee would make no sense whatsoever. This required incredible faith in God and dependence on Him. We know that Israel never celebrated a Sabbatical year, and we have no mention of them ever celebrating the year of jubilee.

I was thinking yesterday how hard it is to convince people to read their Bibles every day. It is even harder to make a requirement for people in a church to hold to a set of standards. For example, what if every leader in a church (besides having to maintain the standards in 1 Tim. 3) had to read their Bible every day and pray, if they had to be doing something to reach out to their neighbors, if they had to be in a home group, if they had to be in a discipleship cell where they were mentored and they had to lead a discipleship cell where they were making disciples? Some of these are really personal things for the Lord, having nothing to do with the church per se, and three of these are "church" things. If you had these as requirements, you probably wouldn't have any leaders. Even if you could justify these in terms of what disciples should be doing in a church or following the Lord in the harvest, there would be an outcry regarding forcing people to follow these. Who has the time for all of this? Who has the right to make this a requirement? No leader or pastor would be so silly as to *require* people to do these. (See Luke 14:25-35.)

Now imagine that you are a king in Israel, even King David, and you're coming up to a Sabbatical year where you will legislate and enforce allowing the land, the nation, to rest for an entire year. Even though it was written in the Word, no one had the guts to require it. There would have been abuse and rebellion. Yet, the entire nation drifted into disobedience, and the warning given in chapter 26 came to pass. There is a cost to following Christ as a disciple in the harvest, but no one wants to require it. I was reading this morning, *If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.* (Luke 16:31)

Leviticus 25:47-55

Vs. 47-54 If a man had to "sell" himself to serve another because of poverty, he could be redeemed or ransomed by others or by himself. The basis of this ransom price would be calculated according to the year of jubilee. This law was a benefit to those in debt or who were very poor.

V. 55 The basis for the redemption and freedom of the people was that all of the people belonged to God and were to have been His servants.

Think about Jesus being our Redeemer, saving us from our slavery to sin and judgment. He Himself is our Redeemer and our ransom price. Oddly enough, we'll see this in the NT today.

Leviticus 26

Leviticus 26 is a very interesting chapter. The book is almost at an end. Much has been laid out as a foundation to understanding what is "holy and common" and "clean and unclean." There will be many more laws to come, to govern different situations; but God is saying in Leviticus that the people should behave differently because they know God's care and love and power.

Now the Lord is giving them the positives of walking as they have been told to walk and then the consequences of not obeying.

In terms of Bible study, a guy named Traina came up with a "law of proportion." What he means is that it is good to notice the proportion of text given to something. For example, in Genesis, in the last words to his sons, Jacob gives much longer blessings to Judah and Joseph. You notice the size or proportion of text given to them in comparison to the other brothers. (In Numbers, you will see a surprising event that you can link back to Jacob's words to Judah and Joseph.) In this case, in chapter 26, we have the blessings given for obedience and curses given for disobedience. Notice the proportion.

Vs. 1-2 This might seem random, but these commands focus on the nature of God and the people's worship and dependence on Him. Since He saved them out of Egypt with such might, feeding them in the desert, this shouldn't inspire fear, but rather faith and love.

Vs. 3-13 These verses are the promises of blessing if they obeyed. The covenant God made with them with Moses was conditioned on their obedience. Notice the promise of vs. 11-13.

Vs. 14-33 These verses are the promise of judgment if they disobeyed. Notice that God will bring judgment in degrees, hoping they will repent, and then if they don't He will increase the judgment. Look for this structure throughout this section. Verse 18 is the first of these increases. Notice the *if...you...sevenfold* scheme of this. God is really trying to show the people mercy. This judgment of the people in the land ends with their exile.

Vs. 34-39 Now the importance of the Sabbatical years comes to light. God is telling them how important this faith and obedience (or lack of it) will be. The Sabbath and the Sabbatical year were a gauge to measure their true faith and love. Even after the exile, God would pursue and chasten them. In fact, the 70 years of exile were because of the number of Sabbatical years they had missed in the 490 years they were in the land, organized under a king.

Vs. 40-46 God is already making provision for Israel to return from exile. Read Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, and it is obvious, for a couple of reasons, that he had read v. 40 and the rest of this section. We'll talk about this verse when we get to Daniel's prayer.

V. 42 Even though Israel would break the Mosaic Covenant, God was still bound to them by the covenant He made with Abraham. The true object of faith in God, even under the Mosaic Covenant, was God's promise of redemption as given in the promise to Abraham. Paul says this in Romans, chapter 4. It is because of God's promise to Abe that Israel will be restored and will fulfill their destiny as a witness to the nations.

V. 43 Notice again how important the Sabbatical year was as a gauge of the peoples' hearts toward God.

V. 45 This again is the promise to Abraham.

Leviticus 27:1-13

Vs. 1-8 I don't know if we want to try this in church, but who knows, it could be a hit. People could dedicate other people or animals to the service of the temple. For example, Samuel's mother dedicated him to the Lord. People could be given to the Lord for service. This is also how some of us try to get Jephthah off the hook in Judges 11, when he says he will dedicate or sacrifice the first person who runs out to meet him when he comes home. He was hoping it would be a servant, but it was his only child, his daughter. Since human sacrifice was forbidden, it is hard to imagine he sacrificed his daughter. But in this chapter, it is saying that those "given" to the Lord could be redeemed, bought back. He could have gotten his daughter back for a mere 10 shekels, pocket change. If she wasn't sacrificed, it means that the strength of his vow was, in his own eyes, irrevocable.

Vs. 9-13 Regarding the animals, the Levites still needed to eat something more than the sacrifices. The Levites also farmed the land around the cities they lived in and needed animals, like donkeys or horses, to bear burdens and plow fields. People could donate or vow an animal to their use. If it was vowed, they could "redeem" it, unless it was for sacrifice. When this continues tomorrow, we'll see that this redemption price was also geared to the year of jubilee.

The symbolism that God was building into Israel with all of these laws, regarding the year of jubilee and redemption, is all pointing to Jesus.

### **Mark 10:32-52**

Vs. 32-34 The threats against Jesus were so real that the Twelve feared every step toward Jerusalem and were amazed at Jesus' resolve. Note that Jesus was always aware of His disciples and ready to give them His time. When He saw they were terrified about what was waiting for them in Jerusalem, He took them aside and told them again of His coming death and resurrection.

Vs. 35-40 In the request of James and John, notice that Mark fails to mention that their mother, Salome, was with them when this request was made. Tradition has it that Jesus' mother and the mother of James and John were sisters. They might have thought they had an "in" because they were related. Notice that Jesus mentioned suffering and that James and John were ready to suffer. James would be the first of the Twelve who would die and John, according to tradition, was the last.

Vs. 41-45 Notice here that when Jesus sees that the other disciples are upset, He teaches the disciples. There is no rebuke, but positive, forward teaching. And out of this we get one of the greatest verses in the NT for the disciple in Mark 10:45, *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

The model for discipleship was Jesus, in His serving, in His suffering, and in giving His life as a ransom for others.

What Jesus is saying here is directly connected to what we read in Leviticus today. Jesus is that redeemer, that ransom price and that substitute, all rolled into one.

Vs. 46-52 Here we have the story of Bartimaeus again. Remember that there was an old and new Jericho connected by a two-mile road filled with beggars and merchants.

V. 47 Whenever you hear someone calling Jesus the *Son of David*, it means they had great faith.

V. 50 Notice that the blind man throws off his cloak. A cloak was a very important possession to a beggar. In fact, in Deuteronomy, God will give official legislation regarding the cloak of a poor man. For Bartimaeus to cast off his cloak was risky business, unless he fully believed he was about to talk with the Son of David, who would rule Israel and heal its blind.

### **Psalm 45**

I've got to admit that I do better with "crying out" psalms than I do with this one. Is this one of David's marriages or is it one of Solomon's? No clue.

If you are given to typology, that is, an event or person in the past, suggesting another event or person in the future, you could imagine this might have something to do with Christ and His bride, the church. I say this because if you read the first chapter of Hebrews, where the Son is being described as the ultimate message from God, right in the middle of this, you find Psalm 45:6. (Heb 1:8). I don't know how many lines of correspondence you can draw, but I do know that when we disciples are done with our work in the harvest, there will be this huge party called the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is where the church, the bride of Christ, will be eternally joined to Christ. It'll be a great party and feast, and I'll be off my diet on that day.

V. 1 Apparently the king and queen were married and were taking their thrones for the first time.

Vs. 2-9 The description of the king grows from a human king, perhaps David, to the Son of Man, the eternal, human son of David. Notice that both vs. 6 and 7 apply to Jesus.

Vs. 10-17 This bride would be the church, but as typology goes, it could apply to Israel or to all the redeemed. Notice that in v. 17 the name of this bride is honored by all peoples through all generations. Israel will certainly be honored forever for how God has used them as a tool, an object lesson, and a vehicle for bringing salvation to all mankind. On the other hand, it is the church right now that is being used to hold back the night and work in the harvest until Israel is ready to fulfill their destiny. If I had to vote, I'd say the bride is the church.

### **Proverbs 10:22**

There seems to be something bad or stressful to be found in everything. I think the idea here is learning to be totally immersed in God as our love and our life. In those brief moments I've had where I've understood this, there was no sorrow and I felt rich. I think our closeness to the Lord is the goal, not the absence of irritants.

Now just for fun, the German Bible has a variant reading, hinted at in the ESV. In German it says,

*Der Segen des HERRN allein macht reich, und nichts tut eigene Mühe hinzu.* (LUT Proverbs 10:22)

Isn't that interesting? Oh, sorry, *The blessing of the Lord alone makes one rich, and nothing you do yourself brings this or adds to it.*

### **MARCH 3**

Time to celebrate again! Today you will finish the third book in the OT and begin the fourth. You deserve a Blarney© Latte!

### **Leviticus 27:14-34**

Vs. 14-25 The temporary donation or "vow" of a house or land will make more sense when we read Numbers. The Levites did not inherit any land. They had to live among the people. As the nation became more organized and social needs grew, people could "vow" houses and land to the Levites to use for themselves, or for the widows and orphans, for example, that the Levites helped. It could also be that some of these houses might have been used by the Levites for schools. You get the picture.

V. 19 If a person needed the house or land back, they could redeem it but all of this was done with respect to the year of jubilee.

Vs. 26-27 All firstborn animals belonged to the Lord, even the firstborn donkey or camel. These would have to be "bought back" from the Lord. It is interesting that they didn't call this a tax. It was a redemption, therefore having a very symbolic meaning that would become a part of their lives and culture.

Vs. 28-29 This is referring to things given permanently. This was different from something vowed for a period of time. A person devoted to death meant that he had committed a felony punishable by death, and therefore he could not be ransomed, but had to pay for his sin.

Vs. 30-34 Even the tithe of the crops could be redeemed.

One of the first blog entries I wrote in February of 2010 was titled "Who needs Leviticus?" The answer is, "We do." Because of the relational nature of Christianity today, we are tempted to treat God as common, like a buddy; and we forget how awesomely holy and separate He is. We

imagine Him as just a big, mighty version of ourselves, who will even occasionally laugh at our crassness and bad habits. Not so. The fact that He loves us and helps us should be beyond our comprehension, considering how holy and majestic He is. Leviticus brings us back to a place of balance, understanding that our heavenly Father, our Lord and the Holy Spirit are holy and worthy of our complete and holy devotion.

### **Numbers 1:1-54**

V. 1 The time marker here is very important. This is taking place one month after they set up the tabernacle. (See Ex. 40:2.) This means that everything in the book of Leviticus took a month.

Vs. 2-19 I wonder how they came up with the name for this book? Even though there had been a census when the people came out of Egypt, this is official and emphasizes the ordering of the nation before God. The people will be organized around the tabernacle and be given a specific organization for traveling to the land. The people should have been kind of excited.

One thing to constantly keep in mind is that they had the manna every day and they had the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. They lived in the presence of God and the supernatural. Also, notice that the only ones counted were men 20 and up. If you understand this, you realize that the size of Israel had to be in the millions. That the Lord was feeding them every day was amazing.

Vs. 20-46 Notice the size of the tribes. Which tribe is the biggest? How does this relate back to Jacob's parting words in Genesis 49? Now (and this is a trick question), who is the second largest? This also relates back to Jacob. In Jacob's parting words, Joseph receives a huge portion. Although Ephraim is given the firstborn designation, two tribes are counted here as the people of Joseph. Judah is still bigger. In one very important event in Numbers, the tribes of Judah and Ephraim will be exalted in Israel, represented by two men.

Vs. 47-54 The Levites are given a great honor. God already had this planned, obviously, since both Aaron and Moses were of the tribe of Levi. But, remember when Moses asked who was on the Lord's side when he needed help regarding the golden calf? It was the entire tribe of Levi that came to him and helped to avert God's anger in the camp of Israel. Though the Levites would receive no inheritance in the land, they were given a special position in the nation, literally and figuratively, as mediators between God and the people.

V. 53 This means that the Levites would camp encircled around the tabernacle as a kind of buffer zone between God and the people. Again, there is great symbolism in God choosing this one tribe to have no inheritance on earth, but to be near the Lord and serve His people.

The church (Jesus' disciples following during this time of harvest) is also told it has no inheritance on earth. Jesus taught His disciples that as they abided in Him, their reward was in heaven and their commission was on earth to follow Him in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. The disciple's role in assisting people to come before the Lord and worship Him has a sense of being a Levite or a priest. Look at 1 Peter 2:9 and then read how Paul saw his service to the Gentiles in Romans 15:16. It is clear that in order to serve, worship and follow Jesus now, we must have our inheritance in heaven and see our time on earth as service for Him in making disciples and leading the lost to Christ.

### **Mark 11:1-25**

Vs. 1-11 This is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people thought He was coming as the eternally reigning king, but He was coming as the Lamb of God.

Vs. 2-6 Notice that even though "disaster" would follow, Jesus was showing the disciples that all was divinely planned.

Vs. 9-10 Apparently *Hosanna* means something like, "God, come and save us." They misunderstood what this "coming" meant. Next time Jesus will be coming to reign over the world.

V. 11 This is interesting. It was apparently late so Jesus just looked around to get the lay of the land and prepare for the next day.

Vs. 12-14 This passage has always puzzled me. When Jesus curses the fig tree, why does Mark mention that it wasn't the season for figs? That sort of makes Jesus' expectation unrealistic and the curse senseless.

What I understand is this. If it had been fig season, Jesus could have seen the fruit, or lack thereof, from a distance. This explains why he went to the tree to look. It wasn't fig season. It was, however, common food for people to eat the buds where the figs would grow. These came out first and then were covered by the leaves, making them invisible. People ate these buds. Jesus assumed there would be buds but couldn't see them. He could have seen the figs. He had to go and look, because it wasn't fig season, so he couldn't see that there were no buds to eat. The absence of the buds meant no figs later in the year and that the tree was unfruitful.

Vs. 15-19 This was the second time Jesus cleansed the temple. He did it at the first Passover of His ministry and now at the final Passover of His ministry.

V. 17 It is interesting that Mark mentions that the temple was meant to be *a house of prayer for the nations*. It will be in the future.

V. 18 Jesus taught right up to the end and the people were astonished at His teaching. The astonishment of the people made the leaders fearful. How funny.

Vs. 20-25 Now, after reading about Jesus cleansing the temple, we can see how symbolic this sign was. The nation was the unfruitful tree. Within 40 years, that generation would be judged for their lack of faith and unfruitfulness. The temple would be destroyed and the city left in ruins, and many of the Jews would be killed by the Romans.

Vs. 22-24 So, why does Jesus give the disciples, what appears to be, a lesson on faith that can curse trees and move mountains? In the context of the harvest and in the coming commission to the church, they were given authority to use God's power. I think the lesson is regarding fruitlessness vs. fruitfulness. If we are working in the harvest and have faith as a mustard seed, we will never be fruitless. Our asking will be focused on the harvest and the Spirit will direct His power to the harvest.

V. 25 Jesus mentioned forgiveness frequently in the training of the Twelve. You cannot mediate forgiveness if you are harboring unforgiveness toward others. In that case, God withholds mercy from us for our failings, and we lack authority in His service. This is a very important thing for us as we work in the harvest. For the disciples, the events that would follow would stretch them in terms of being able to forgive others. My take on this.

## **Psalm 46**

A probable time for Psalm 46, and the historical period for the other psalms written by the sons of Korah, is the reign of Hezekiah. Psalm 46 was probably written after the events recorded in 2 Kings 18-19. Jerusalem was surrounded by the invincible army of an arrogant king.

V. 1 This is the declaration, after the fact. What God did was amazing. One night, there was no hope. In the morning, there was no enemy.

Vs. 2-3 Compare the threat of the Assyrian army to the poetic threat of the raging seas, shaking the earth to its foundations, waiting with its mouth wide open, devouring mountains. The Assyrians had "defeated" all the other gods, and thus "devoured" all the other mountains or

hopes or refuges of the surrounding nations. Now they made a mistake. They came to the wrong mountain, and to the wrong, actually the real, God.

Vs. 4-5 These verses are a contrast to the chaos outside Jerusalem and the situation in the middle of God's city on top of His mountain. A stream flows out from His throne, spreading throughout the city, bringing peace and a mellow, intoxicating joy. God is the cause, because of His presence. Deliverance will come in the morning, usually seen as the time of worship and prayers to God.

Vs. 6-7 The nations have to rage to make *kingdoms totter*, but God only needs to say a word. Verse 7 is God's victory and Israel's declaration, which will be repeated again.

Vs. 8-9 This tells the people to look and see what God did with a word. In 2 Kings 19 it says in very few words, almost anticlimactically, that God sent out an angel, and 185,000 soldiers were slain in their sleep. The Assyrians awoke; the camp was full of dead bodies, and they went home. There was a lot of supplies and equipment left behind, and the people used the weapons and chariots for firewood.

Vs. 10-11 This tells us what to do when we have no place to find refuge or help or hope. Amen.

### **Proverbs 10:23**

Basically this Proverb is a gauge to see if we are fools or people of understanding. A fool gets "a kick" out of doing stupid stuff. It feeds his heart to frustrate a boss or get some silliness going. It's like telling a good joke.

For a person of understanding the same is true. It feeds his heart to find wisdom and to put it into practice, seeing it work through his family or group of friends.

It may be that we can say of ourselves that while we are not fools, we haven't yet learned to be persons of understanding. If finding and using wisdom doesn't yet feed our hearts, it needs to.

## **MARCH 4**

### **Numbers 2-3**

#### Numbers 2

So, before you "Google" a chart or a map or revert to some other source, get a piece of paper and colored markers or pencils, or steal your kids crayons (or use your own); and read through this section and map it out yourself. If you do, you'll gain confidence in your ability to figure stuff out. If you Google it, well, you already know how to use a search engine. Try it yourself. Make sure if you draw the tabernacle first, both the entrance to the outer court and the entrance to the tabernacle proper faced east. When you place the tribes in order around the tabernacle, leave room between the tribes and the tabernacle for the families of the Levites. The positions of the families of the Levites will be given in chapter 3.

The only thing I would bring to your attention is the major tribe of Israel that was placed opposite the entrance of the tabernacle. This was a great honor and is a foreshadowing of what is to come for that tribe.

Seeing how God chooses, it reminds me that regardless of who we are, the very fact that we have somehow come to know Christ is an amazing honor. We feel tired and beaten up and depressed, but it is only because of the toxic atmosphere of this place and this body of death we lug around with us. Ephesians 1-3 gives you a lift, and so does Romans 5:1-6. It is an incredible honor and miracle that we know the Lord and are following.

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and*

*we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* (Romans 5:1-6)

Vs. 1-9 This is the camp of Judah. Notice that each camp had its own flag. You noted that Judah was the largest tribe and is given a place of honor here. This reflects back to Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49. Notice too that this camp began the march first. This naming went clockwise, but the camp unraveled counter-clockwise.

Vs. 10-16 This is the camp of Reuben. They were second to join the march.

V. 17 Sandwiched in the middle, and protected by all, were the Levites and the tabernacle.

Vs. 18-24 This is the camp of Ephraim. Notice that this camp represents all of the children of Rachel.

Vs. 25-31 This was the camp of Dan, and they were the rear guard.

Vs. 32-34 God is preparing the people to march to the land.

So, how do you figure out how many people were in the camp of Israel? If there were 603,550 men from 20 years old and up (who could fight) from all the tribes but Levi, and if there were 22,000 total men from Levi, we have about 625,550 men. There were probably more women, but for simplicity, let's just double the men. Now we're up to 1,251,100. Now, there were at least this many kids because the people were very "fruitful," but if we only added another 625,550, we're up to almost 2 million people. There were probably over 3 million and estimates say there were 6-10 million. Later when Moses blesses the Lord as the camp of Israel comes to rest in Numbers 10:36, he will say, *Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.* My wife has informed me that ten thousand thousands equals 10 million.

Numbers like this are important to think about. When it says Jesus fed 5000, it says in Matthew 14:21, *And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.* The likelihood is that Jesus actually fed over 15,000 people.

What God was doing for Israel every day in the wilderness was a "class A" miracle.

Numbers 3

Now comes the tribe of Levi. They will become the servants of Israel, but even more, they will protect Israel and act as mediators between a holy God and the people. If you've made a diagram of the camp of Israel, we'll now find out where they were to camp, and what their responsibilities were in taking down, transporting and rebuilding the tabernacle.

Vs. 1-4 Aaron is mentioned first, because only his descendants could be priests in Israel.

Vs. 5-10 This will be the function of the Levites. It is interesting that they are "given" to Aaron. Their job is to guard (also care for) different parts of the tabernacle. Aaron would be their boss and he would guard the priesthood.

Vs. 11-13 This is very interesting. All of the firstborn of Israel were to be dedicated to the Lord. In their place, God took the Levites.

Vs. 14-20 After Aaron, there were three main clans in the tribe of Levi. Notice that they were listed from one month old.

Vs. 21-26 These are the Gershonites. Notice where they camped, what they guarded and what they were responsible for when they had to take down and rebuild the tabernacle.

Vs. 27-32 These are the Kohathites. Again, notice all the particulars. Notice too that Eleazar, Aaron's son, is mentioned here because of the taking down of the Holy Place, the Holy of Holies and all of the furniture in those places. Later we'll find out what Aaron and his sons had to do to the furniture, so that the Kohathites didn't get blasted.

Vs. 33-37 The Merarites were last and took down all the frames.

Vs. 38-39 Aaron and Moses where camped between the entrance to the tabernacle and the camp of Judah.

Now, if you add up all the totals for the Levites, it is more than 22,000. It is suggested that the extra 300 were themselves firstborn in the tribe of Levi and so were not included in what follows.

Vs. 40-51 This is the redemption of the firstborn from the people of Israel. Again, in the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 220, it is suggested that the firstborn being counted were since the Exodus, since the firstborn previous to the Exodus were covered by the blood of a lamb.

To me, it's interesting to see how often God built redemption and substitution into the lives of the people of Israel. They would have constantly been reminded that sin required a substitute and payment for redemption. You notice too, that God mentions that everything belonged to Him. That means that He Himself provided the redemption price and the substitute. That's exactly what He did with Jesus too.

### **Mark 11:27-12:17**

It's amazing that the leaders were so set on killing Jesus. When you see irrationality working at this level, you know it is of a deep sick spiritual origin. There are situations I have been in, where at one point or another it became clear that "rationality" wasn't the issue. Things had gone deeply spiritual and personal. In those cases, "one more" illustration or attempt to bring sense to things didn't help unless the spiritual root was addressed.

#### Mark 11:27-33

This confrontation comes as a result of Jesus cleansing the temple. It looks very much like what happened in John 2, when Jesus cleansed it three years earlier. We read about this in Matthew so there isn't too much to add here.

In Jesus trying to get the scribes to admit that John's authority was from heaven, had they done that, it would have been admitting that Jesus was from heaven. John bore witness to Jesus. Their silence was not just an admission of their hardness of heart, but it gave the people the freedom to keep regarding Him as the possible Messiah. A similar thing happened in John 7.

#### Mark 12:1-17

Vs. 1-12 We read this parable in Matthew. A couple of thoughts to add to this reading come from the Bible Knowledge Commentary-NT, pp. 160-161.

First, the image of a vineyard might come from Isaiah 5:1-2. The mention of the stone the builders rejected comes from Psalm 118:22-23.

Also, it is mentioned that with the son coming to the vineyard, it might have been supposed by the tenants that the owner was dead. If they killed the heir, it could be theirs. Apparently back then, possession was nine tenths of the law, especially if the land holder lived in a foreign, distant country. That makes more sense to me. When applied to man's response to God's messengers and Son, it is still irrational. But then, we are man.

V. 12 Notice again that the scribes understood that the parable was told against them, but rather than repentance, there was increased hate. If they hadn't feared the people, they would have taken Jesus then.

Vs. 13-17 This is the trap regarding the giving of taxes. Again, the trap was in trying to get Jesus to say, "yes" or "no," to paying taxes. If Jesus had said, "yes," the people would have been upset. If Jesus had said, "no," the Romans would have gotten mad. In Jesus answering this way, He supported paying taxes, humbled His enemies and spoke wisdom to the crowd. They would see that the real issue was honoring the one from whom we received our image.

### **Psalm 47**

This was written by the sons of Korah; and with the tone of this psalm, it might also have been composed after Jerusalem's adventures with the Assyrians. To sense fully what is being celebrated, read 2 Kings 18-19.

Vs. 1-4 If you look back to what the sons of Korah wrote in Psalm 44:9-26 on March 1, you'll see here that the answer arrived. God acted and the news went out to all of the world. Israel had the promises and the right theology, but now they saw that in fact, God reigns over all nations and selected Israel as His messenger.

Vs. 5-7 The appropriate thing to do is always to praise God. It is one of those things God always deserves whether we feel like it or not.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that this declares the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. This is the promise of redemption to all nations through Israel and their God. I've never noticed v. 9 before. How cool.

The Assyrians were making a push to become the first world empire and were threatening all the surrounding nations. Because of the amazing deliverance at Jerusalem and the destruction of the Assyrian army, the world was now looking to the God of Israel.

### **Proverbs 10:24-25**

Amen!

## **MARCH 5**

### **Numbers 4-5**

Numbers 4

What I find interesting in all of this is the amount of organization the Lord put into founding the nation. Especially because of His holiness, and also because He was making a symbolic point regarding approaching Him, God took great care in putting the worship and logistics of marching and moving and packing up, etc., into a form that the people could follow.

Often they say in leadership to give people responsibility but not to prescribe how they have to get the job done. More often than not, people need direction at the beginning of anything, and slowly they become competent and independent. God is creating a nation here, so He is giving very specific detail in very important things.

Take note of what each of the four groups were to do. This will become more interesting when the Lord gives them their order of marching. If you made a chart with the tabernacle in the middle and the tribes around it, it will make sense later.

Vs. 1-20 The sons of Kohath had a great honor and great danger. What is interesting is that Aaron and his sons went in first and prepared everything in the Holy Place and packed it and covered it, until it was just goatskins and poles. Then, when everything was properly concealed,

they called the sons of Kohath. If they touched or even saw any of the furniture of the holy places, they died. Aaron and his sons had the responsibility to protect them.

Isn't it cool that the Levites could "retire" at 50? Actually, it didn't mean that those younger or older couldn't help in other ways, but those people who were 30-50 carried the tabernacle and its parts.

As a very real object lesson, God underscores His holiness by forbidding the people to even look upon the items in the Holy Place and Holy of Holies that represent His presence and His provision to them. In 1 and 2 Samuel 6 (what a coincidence that in both books it's in chapter 6), we'll see what happens when well-intentioned people disregard God's holiness and commands regarding the ark of the covenant. All of these restrictions would also look forward to the time when the veil would be torn, and we, as disciples of our Lord, could stand before His throne and know His grace.

Vs. 21-28 The sons of Gershon took down all of the hanging skins and coverings. These were not wool blankets. The panels that made up the tabernacle and the outer court were all animal skins and probably had some weight to them.

Vs. 29-33 The sons of Merari transported the framework for everything.

Vs. 34-49 Notice that v. 47 specifies that this age grouping was for bearing burdens. As I read this I'm impressed with the detail and planning God put into this. We like spontaneity in worship, but God also likes things to be done decently and in order. Discipline in following Christ has fallen on hard times too; but I think you could make a symbolic point from how God ordered the life and worship of Israel, that to follow Christ in the harvest, we do it better if we have discipline and structure.

## Numbers 5

Vs. 1-4 Now we are easing back into laws for governing the nation of Israel. Since, for the first time, the "camp" has now been defined, they were to enact the regulations for lepers and those who were unclean. There was to be some area of housing, "outside the camp," where those who were defiled could stay. Notice, particularly with the lepers, they didn't send them away. They had to remain outside the "city limits," but were still a part of Israel. Remember, this emphasis on uncleanness was symbolic in the community of Israel for their need to remain ready for the worship and service of God.

Vs. 5-10 This is a slant on a law we saw earlier in Leviticus, when a person realized they had done something wrong and restitution had to be made restoring money or livestock. This has a very important connection to worship and keeping the worship of God pure. This is similar in spirit to what Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 5:23-24, *So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* God is not excited about worship from those who have hurt others without making up and making restitution.

In the case of needing to make restitution but the person was dead and had no family, they still had to make restitution. It would be given to God, specifically to the priest. No statute of limitations here. This would be used for the financial provision for the priests.

Vs. 11-31 Well, this is a strange one. The general idea is that if a man were overcome by *the spirit of jealousy*, he was to go to the priest and there would be a supernatural way of figuring out if his wife had been unfaithful. The entire thing was spiritually instigated. It seems that God is singling out the adulterous woman and not the man; but if a woman was caught, the man she committed adultery with would also be caught. There was a law for dealing with adulterers. This

provision deals with the detection of marital defilement; and it works off the idea that the man, being the head of the family, would be roused by this supernatural impulse.

Whatever it was that would happen to the woman was awful and also visual. It wasn't a "scarlet letter," but instead a life-long disability that would not look very appealing. It would be a visual warning to the entire people not to be unfaithful, either to each other, or to God. God identifies Himself as jealous for Israel. Just as a note, later in Numbers, the people will be enticed to worship Baal sexually. At the end of Joshua (22:17), Phinehas mentions that there was still evidence of that sin among the people. That suggests to me, that God allowed some physical disability to be associated with that sin to keep it as a warning before the people.

Don't ask me why I think v. 28 is funny. So what if you're an innocent 50-year-old woman. As a result of your husband's jealousy and this ritual, you're going to be rewarded! And get pregnant!

I'm not sure what your impressions and observations will be, but I'll make a couple of general ones.

First, note the large amount of text and attention given to this. It must have been important.

Second, to take it to the priest, once they were in the land, meant a "road trip." So this was a serious thing and this was the only valid way to work through this sort of a problem. The man had to do the right thing and take her to the tabernacle to the priest.

Along with this issue, the people were to take all severe matters to the priest, because he carried the Urim and Thummim as a way of finding the will of God.

Third, inherent in this entire law, was the symbol of God being the husband and Israel being His wife. What is clear in this law is that any unfaithfulness will be found out and punishment will follow. When God says that He is a jealous God, it brings the symbol of marriage to mind.

As disciples it is easy to slip and pursue all sorts of things besides our Lord and His will in the harvest. God understands; but staying close to Christ, in His Word, in the company of other disciples, helps us to stay focused and faithful to the One who loves us and commissions us to share His love.

### **Mark 12:18-37**

Vs. 18-27 We know this story. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and were trying to get Jesus to give some answer they could ridicule. Oddly enough, most of the priests were Sadducees. Apparently this question had worked well with the scribes and Pharisees, making them look foolish in the eyes of the public. This was a question like, "how many angels can stand on the head of a pin?" To even answer this question made you look silly.

V. 25 So Jesus gave them new information that showed their lack of understanding of the Scripture and of the spiritual life after death. All of this made perfect sense, and in the sight of the people the Sadducees were reeling from this unexpected insight and answer.

Vs. 26-27 Here was the knock-out. Not only didn't they know the power of God; but again, in a very simple and obvious text, they showed that they didn't know the Scriptures. The interesting thing with this illustration is that the Sadducees argued about the interpretation of the law. The story Jesus used was about Moses, but it was about him before the law was given and it taught theology. The Sadducees weren't expecting this passage of Scripture or what it taught.

What stands out to me is that they *knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God*. How many Christians is this true of? When Jesus said they didn't know the Scriptures, He wasn't saying they didn't know any of it, but they didn't have the relationship with God that made sense of it all and that makes the Word alive and unified. So many Christians don't know enough of the Bible to get beneath the surface and find the living pulse of God, much less be led by the Spirit through the

day. Many others know the verses, but there is no love of Christ that makes the Word a light for their lives and to a lost world.

So where do we need to see the power of God? If it is not in the harvest, seeing the lost saved and becoming fully devoted followers of Christ, I'm afraid all we're looking for is a carnival show or a "feel good" experience, like the people mentioned in Matthew 7:21-29.

Vs. 28-34 Although Luke (Luke 20:39) alludes to this scribe, Mark gives us "the rest of the story." It shows that there were some men of spiritual understanding who had open hearts. This scribe was moved by the wisdom and understanding of Jesus' answer. Although the scribes were mostly Pharisees, this man's interest went beyond the political, and he was truly spiritually motivated.

Vs. 29-31 Jesus is putting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 together with Leviticus 19:18. The two commandments are really a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four have to do with God and the last six with our neighbor. Paul uses this teaching in Romans, saying that *love your neighbor* fulfills the law.

V. 34 The sincerity and truth of this encounter stopped the conflict. The opponents of Jesus were humiliated, and when they saw that Jesus actually complimented the scribe, they had nothing more to say.

Vs. 35-37 Generally, the common people understood that the title, *the son of David*, referred to the Messiah. The leaders seem to have reduced this understanding to the Messiah being "only" the son of David. They apparently felt that David was superior to the Messiah.

Notice again how Jesus shows in a very clear insightful passage of Scripture that the Messiah was God and superior to all, and that the leaders didn't understand the Scripture at all. Notice too that the people rejoiced in this clear teaching.

As we follow the Lord in the harvest, teaching His Word, we need to follow His example. We need to know the Scriptures so well that we can simply and clearly show people the power of God and the truth of His Word.

## **Psalm 48**

(Another of the psalms of the sons of Korah)

None of us likes hard times. I really, really don't like them. But think of this. If it is true that they wrote in and around the dangerous and stressful times of the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem under Hezekiah, look at the praise that came out of that dark time. Even the psalms of David reflect the joy and wonder of being delivered by God from threat, danger and death.

You can understand that this kind of great deliverance not only was an amazing thing to Jerusalem, but if the Assyrian army just lost 185,000 men, especially during a time they were making a play to become the world empire of the day, all other nations would not only notice, but they would be afraid to approach Jerusalem, even for a visit. Israel was in the news all over that world. When the ambassadors from Babylon visited Hezekiah after his illness in 2 Kings 20, I'm sure they approached Jerusalem with awe. You can sense some of this awe of the nations in this psalm.

Imagine what God will produce in us if we are in the harvest with Christ, battling for the souls of the lost, ourselves in danger, following in faith, relying on God, living to bring Him glory by bearing much fruit and so proving to be disciples of our Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Since the ridicule of the Assyrians was brought to the gates of Jerusalem, Zion is being exalted as the throne of God and the city of God.

Vs. 4-8 *In the city of the Lord of Hosts*, all remained calm; but the kings who came against Israel were all humbled.

Vs. 9-11 God's *steadfast love* was promised to Abraham, that through Israel all the nations of the world would look toward Israel to be blessed.

### **Proverbs 10:26**

*And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.* (1 Tim. 3:10) The words in 1 Timothy make a good application to this proverb.

## **MARCH 6**

### **Numbers 6-7**

#### Numbers 6

Vs. 1-21 The Nazirite vow was taken by a person wanting to dedicate themselves to the Lord for some special task or perhaps in seeking some answer from the Lord. There is no time limit determined. The two notable things in this vow are that the person couldn't eat or drink anything having to do with a grape (the symbol of pleasure and prosperity) and they had to let their hair grow long, making them stand out socially. In spite of all the depictions of men's hairstyles in ancient days so that the guys looked like Chip & Dale (sp?), I think short hair was the rule. Long hair, like the Nazirite had, would have stood out.

Vs. 9-12 This was a provision if something should happen that defiled a Nazirite during his/her vow.

The three notable men in the Bible who were Nazirites were Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. Samson and Samuel, who lived during the same time, were both dedicated by their parents at birth to be life-long Nazirites. Some people think (hope) this is what Jephthah did to his daughter. Samson, it should be noted, broke all the rules of a Nazirite but one; and you know what happened there. Of all men born, Jesus was the most dedicated to God. When it says in Matthew 2:23, *that he would be called a Nazarene*, it is referring to where He grew up and to His title in Isaiah 11:1, *branch* (Nazareth means branch). Although Matthew is referring to something in the OT, there is no specific reference that anyone has ever found. Jesus couldn't have been a Nazirite because Jesus drank wine and touched dead things (Ok, He did make them alive again). Also, Jesus probably had short hair, otherwise Paul maligned Him when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:14, *Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him...?* So actually, it doesn't seem likely that Jesus had long hair, which he would have had if he'd been a Nazirite.

There is a very interesting reference to Nazirites in Amos 2, if you're up to looking for it.

Vs. 22-27 There was intentionality in everything God did. Even in the blessing of the people, God didn't leave it up to Aaron to come up with his own blessing.

Now just for fun, imagine what this blessing would sound like if you changed out some of the words and it went like, "Lord, I need you to bless me and keep me...I need you to make your face...." You get the idea. It all has to do with our need for the Lord.

V. 27 God's name was to be put upon the people. For an interesting connection here, read John 17 in any version other than the NIV and look for the word "name." Jesus put the name of His Father on all of his disciples. Note too, that John 17 is often referred to as Jesus' "high-priestly prayer."

## Numbers 7

Vs. 1-9 Apparently this is looking back to the dedication of the tabernacle and the altar for burnt offerings. In preparation for the moving of the tabernacle toward the promised land, the tribes brought an offering of oxen and carts for the service of the Levites and then offerings to dedicate the altar.

Notice v. 9. David should have read this, or rather, he should have been advised by the priests and Levites. These guys didn't need any oxen, because all of this holy furniture was to be carried on poles on their shoulders.

Vs. 10-89 The order of the tribes giving their offering reflects their lodging position around the tabernacle as given in Numbers 2. It is significant that Judah is the first tribe to offer their sacrifice. They will be the "alpha" tribe for the rest of Israel's history. We have seen the name of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, three times prior to this. These names appear in Jesus' genealogy in the NT, Jesus being from the tribe of Judah. But one other point of interest is that Aaron's wife was Nahshon's sister. That means that the priests of Israel would all be related to the tribe of Judah. Again, this is just trivia; but Jesus' mother Mary, who was of the tribe of Judah, was a relative of Elizabeth, who was a Levite related to Aaron.

2.5 shekels was about an ounce. If you're curious, you can figure out the value of the metals by Googling the exchange rates for today.

V. 89 This is as if to say that all was complete. When Moses walked into the tabernacle, into the Holy Place, he heard God's voice coming from beyond the veil *above the mercy seat*. This symbolic separation from God is important in that it shows how different our relationship to God is in Jesus. As disciples in the harvest, the good news we are able to share is that in Jesus that veil is gone, and *we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him*. (Ephesians 3:12) *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:16)

Everything that we are reading had an immediate application to Israel, teaching them and us about God's holiness and the importance of being clean and ready to serve Him. But the Lord was also getting ready to show us the fulfillment of these symbols in our Savior and our salvation.

### **Mark 12:38-13:13**

Mark 12:38-44

Vs. 38-40 In Mark, these are Jesus' last publicly spoken words in His ministry. The rest will be for the disciples.

Funny that the last thing He said was to *beware of the scribes*. The scribes figured out and taught the laws that issued down to the people. Apparently, some of the "laws" they made either took widows' houses from them or persuaded the widows to give their houses to the temple and the scribes lived in them.

Vs. 41-44 Oddly enough, the next, and last, story of Jesus' public ministry has to do with a widow who gave everything she had, in contrast to those who gave much more, but out of their abundance.

For us as disciples, we need to think about this. We tire quickly of giving out of our abundance. Most people in the western world have reserves that are undreamed of by other people on this planet. The Lord has a special place in His heart for sacrifice that shows absolute desire to give everything to Him.

## Mark 13:1-13

Vs. 1-8 We've already had something like this in Matthew. What does it make you think of? I see two things happening. First, things will get a lot worse. Second, there will be persecution of those who follow Christ. What Jesus is saying here has a near and a far fulfillment. The near fulfillment will be the judgment of that particular generation, climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The far fulfillment will be in the Tribulation.

Vs. 9-13 These words are not only written for the disciples then, but they are written for all disciples who will endure persecution. Jesus has already said these things to His disciples on a couple of occasions. The group of disciples that this will really apply to will be those who come to faith during the seven-year Tribulation.

For us as disciples, we know that things will only get worse, so the work we need to do is in the harvest now, not trying to make heaven on earth or thinking the next election will save the day. As the storm clouds gather on the horizon, we are here to keep working in the harvest with our Lord, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

## Psalm 49

Vs. 1-4 Notice the universal call to all people. The mention of rank and wealth will be important themes in this psalm.

Vs. 5-6 So, in a sense, this psalm has to do with living without fear, particularly from others who have rank and wealth.

Vs. 7-12 After what we've read in Leviticus regarding redemption and what we know about redemption in the New Testament, this is interesting. Verses 7-8 explain the dilemma. When it comes to our lives before God, humanly speaking, there is nothing we can pay God and there is no one who can take our place. The evidence of this is death. Nothing can keep us from dying, and so, death shows there is nothing we can pay for our souls before God. The end is spiritual death.

I was reading about Jesus telling His disciples that they shouldn't fear those who could only kill the body but could not kill the soul. God is the one who can cast into hell, where people become eternally separated from Him. It is interesting that fear is mentioned in v. 5.

Vs. 13-14 Verse 14 struck me where it says, *death shall be their shepherd*. I know there is a sense in which the arrogant and unbelieving get what they deserve, but we still need to try and flag them down as they go speeding by, to warn them the bridge is out. Death as a shepherd is a very gripping image.

V. 15 This must have been understood by those who loved God, that God would make a way of redemption. He would supply a redeemer. Think back on the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

Vs. 16-20 With all of this truth in mind, the psalmist agrees with Jesus. There is no need to fear for our daily needs. We have a very present and caring Heavenly Father. On the other hand, Jesus gave His disciples a double warning about pursuing riches in Luke 12:15. They were not only to take heed, but beware.

## Proverbs 10:27-28

Amen again! *The fear of the Lord* molds our view of life and expectations, leading us to joy. Those who disregard the Lord have no clue. This is what leads them to a tragic end. As the psalmist says, they will perish like the beasts, without understanding or hope of eternal life.

## MARCH 7

### Numbers 8-9

Most of what is happening here is in retrospect; that is, it happened before the census that begins the book. It is looking back to the order of service and the servants of the tabernacle and then to the first Passover in the tabernacle. If you look at the date notation of Numbers 9:1-5, you'll notice it is about 15 days earlier than the date given for the census in Numbers 1:1. Apparently God doesn't know North Americans always like to read things in chronological order. Actually, when this was written, who were the North Americans? Maybe they wouldn't have minded.

#### Numbers 8

Vs. 1-4 These were the seven lampstands inside the outer court around the tabernacle, but not the one lampstand in the Holy Place. These lampstands would have allowed for light in the courtyard. It makes sense that they would have needed light so that sacrifices could have been made in the evening and so the priests could see to go into the Holy Place in the evening. This was an instruction not given earlier.

Vs. 5-26 This cleansing of the Levites actually took place before the Passover feast in chapter 9. Logistically, this cleansing would have taken a few days, and it was important to get the Levites cleansed so they could serve in the Passover preparation and following feast.

Vs. 5-8 So, the Levites were cleansed outside and in. I don't know how to read v. 7. I mean, they didn't have to be bald, so does this mean shaving everything (armpits, etc.) or was it just some kind of trimming? It wasn't required for Aaron or his sons and, from this point on, was never required of any priest or any Levite.

My understanding of this is that it was a very visual, one-time cleansing, and that they shaved all the hair off their bodies, head to toe, like making them newborns, showing they were born for the service of Israel.

Vs. 9-11 Representatives of the people actually laid hands on the representatives of the Levites to set them apart for the service, thereby transferring the status of "firstborn" from the people to the Levites. In a way, the Levites were a ransom for the people. Read what it says about the Levites taking the place of the firstborn and the link to the Passover night when the firstborn were killed.

V. 21 Notice that it mentions a couple of times that Aaron offered the Levites as a wave offering. Usually the priest waved sheaves of barley or wheat in thanks to God for the harvest and then this offering belonged to the priests. This meant that whatever symbolism was present for Pentecost and the Feast of the Firstfruits was present here also. The wave offering was a thanksgiving for the provision and blessing of God, there represented in His provision of food, and here in His provision of service for the people. This tribe was given to serve and protect (v.19). The Levites were a living sacrifice presented to God.

Take your time reading this and do a lot of underlining. There is a lot of interesting stuff and lots of symbolism.

Symbolically, I think that this is what the church is meant to be to the world.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)*

*But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:15-16)*

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

## Numbers 9

Vs. 1-14 This Passover means that the people had been out of Egypt for one year. God has done some incredible work in a year, making them a nation with laws and order. The entire nation was built and focused around their worship of God. Every law and ordinance, and every feast and ceremony, have been connected to their relationship with God and His love for them.

Vs. 6-12 Notice in v. 6 there are actually guys who understood the laws and realized they were out of step and came to Moses and Aaron. What this tells me is that even though they were more than 2 million people, they were really obeying. I can't think of any group of two million people anywhere who all obey anything. It says in the text that it happened here. Too bad it wouldn't last very long. God made provisions for exceptions. If the people would have come to the priest and asked, it seems that God was ready to extend grace.

Vs. 13-14 It only makes sense that if people didn't want to be a part of this covenant community with God, they could have left. Israel had plenty of neighbors to whom they could have gone. But if they were part of the community, they needed to live according to the rules. It could be that being "cut off" would mean excommunication from Israel. Yet the fact that he would bear his sin suggests that if a man could, but didn't go to the Passover, he would be punished by death. In Israel's history, we will see plenty of patience and mercy on God's part, but ultimately, to openly resist God, or worse, to spit in His face, resulted in death. Foreigners, on the other hand, who became part of the community by circumcision, were invited to become part of the community.

Vs. 15-23 This is a summary of what happened when they moved, over the next 39 years. The tabernacle has just been set up, and the order of priests and Levites and the plan for taking down and setting up the tabernacle has just been given. Israel, organized as they are now, has never marched. That will happen tomorrow. Get ready.

There are so many things in this section that are amazing. They lived in the visual, daily presence of God's grace to them. They awoke every morning to the absolute certainty of His blessing. They had a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, and food every morning - miracles beyond our comprehension. How much more secure and blessed and confident as a nation could you be? And with all of that, in a couple of chapters you'll want to cry.

We, of course, are the same. We have been given the absolute blessing of the Father. We are secure eternally in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is exactly why we need the church. The church is comprised of disciples following Christ into the harvest to glorify the Father by bearing fruit and so proving to be disciples of our Lord. We need each other to keep us encouraged and focused on the truth, in the harvest and aflame in His love. We need each other. None of us is always up and always feeling great about ourselves or our walk with the Lord. This mission is very serious and full of joy and purpose to be sure, but we get tired. We forget the stakes are grave and that people without Christ, from every race and nation and language, are in some sense, our responsibility. We are to be those consecrated people, set apart by God, to give our lives in service to Christ to reach them, that they might be saved. This is the love and joy of Christ. To live for worship services and pot lucks has nothing to do with the true love of Christ, and it's not a lot of fun. It only gets us the kind of temporary devotion we see all over today, and what we'll see in Israel in the next week.

## Mark 13:14-37

Vs. 14-23 Jesus is now issuing a future warning to the believing Jews who will be in Jerusalem during the Tribulation at the close of the age. The judgment of the Lord on the earth will last seven years. The first 3.5 years will take their toll in natural disasters, but Israel will enjoy peace from these disasters and from the attack of its neighbors. During this time there will be a revival of faith among the Jews, not only in a return to orthodoxy, bringing about the rebuilding of the temple; but many will come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. These followers of Christ will become the greatest missionary movement in history and will blanket the earth (Mk. 13:10). The hour when Israel will be a witness to the world will come. People from every nation will believe. In Jerusalem there will be two witnesses, like Moses and Aaron, who will be calling down all of this trouble. The book of Revelation shows us the "heavenly" side of what is happening (broken seals, etc.), but these two men will be the human side of the story.

At the midway point in these seven years, there will be a judgment in heaven. (It may be at this point, because Satan is otherwise occupied, that an army from the far north will come to attack Jerusalem and be destroyed as it camps in the area around the Dead Sea.) Satan will be cast out and everything will become much darker. The witnesses will be slain. Satan's human governor, the "anti-Christ," will finally be fed up with the Jews and the spread of faith (resistance to his rule). He will launch a campaign of extermination, against both the Jews and all believers in Christ. At this middle point, he will break the peace agreement with Israel, enter the temple and defile it, making it "unclean" for worship by setting up an image of some kind of abomination, and declare himself to be god or like god, a kind of Christ. At this point, when those living in that generation, who are in Jerusalem, hear of this guy entering the temple, they are to fly into the hills, probably toward Jordan and the Dead Sea.

V. 19 means that things will get exponentially worse. The Tribulation will kick into afterburner. Both Jews and Christians will be sought and killed worldwide; and yet, they will be hidden by some of the people on the planet. Let's call them the sheep. Not everyone will be blind to how the Word of God is playing out. There will be a minority from every nation who will have faith. Yet the time will be so intense that it would lead to the human race exterminating itself. The Jews as a people will cry out, somewhere, somehow, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;" and, as Jesus promised when He wept over Jerusalem before His crucifixion, He will come, in the clouds, returning to the Mt. of Olives where He left His disciples.

All of this will make sense for the people going through it. Verse 23 is Jesus' encouragement and warning to them.

Vs. 24-31 All of this is a summary of Jesus' coming, short and sweet.

V. 27 When Jesus comes He will come with everyone, all who have ever believed in Him from the OT and the church. Those killed during the Tribulation will also be resurrected. In sending out His angels at this time, He is gathering all of the Jewish and Gentile believers on the planet, unresurrected, to Jerusalem. After this, begins the judgment of the Gentile nations (the sheep and the goats) and then the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 28-31 In the parables, Jesus describes this as "the close of the age." A new age will begin. He will reign 1000 years on the earth. The generation mentioned in v. 30 is the generation that sees the temple defiled by the abomination that makes desolate. This is all meant to give hope to the people reading Mark and going through the great Tribulation.

Vs. 32-37 The hour of v. 32 is the initial time of the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation. Nothing will ever be normal again after the start, just like in the days of Noah. Things seemed fine up until the first drop.

When this begins is not for us to know. So, to make a cool transition and to figure out what we are supposed to stay awake for and what we're supposed to be doing, let's go to the disciples asking this question to Jesus.

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11)*

## **Psalm 50**

So my question is, did you read 50 psalms last year? If not, congratulations! What an amazing thing, and it's only March and you've already read 50 psalms.

Your observations here are more valuable than anything I have to say.

This is the first psalm we've read by Asaph, the chief of David's singers. Asaph was present when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, and the sons of Asaph were present in temple worship throughout Israel's history.

Jesus just talked about the Tribulation. Look at v. 3; in fact, you can read the entire psalm in terms of God refining His people and preparing them for the final day of judgment on the earth. This is not only a messianic psalm, but it is one of those psalms when Israel's future glory is predicted.

Vs. 1-6 Notice all of the imagery here to the Lord returning to Zion. He gathers His faithful and calls the nations to judgment.

Vs. 7-15 The basis of salvation, even during the period of the law and the symbolism of the sacrifices, was always to love God. Verse 15 is something the nation will do during the Tribulation and before the coming of Christ.

Vs. 16-20 Notice in v. 16 that these people were religious, but not so in love with God that it changed them. Like most people, religion was a cloak to achieve their own ends and live like they wanted.

Vs. 21-23 This is the warning of the psalm. God will return with punishment and reward. Amen.

## **Proverbs 10:29-30**

What is interesting in this stronghold is that it is relational. Knowing God and loving Him, following His way, is not dependent on education or wealth or race. The Lord protects those who love Him and follow Him, yet the reaction of those who resist Him will ruin them.

Notice that if you think of the truth being expressed here in terms of the reality of the Lord's return, v. 30 has a fuller meaning.

The sin within us is still the number one killer of mankind. The only cure is Christ. That is why we follow Him in the harvest, abiding in the vine, bringing the message of salvation and making disciples, who make disciples until our Lord appears.

## MARCH 8

### Numbers 10:1-11:23

Get ready to roll!

#### Numbers 10

Vs. 1-10 The trumpets were the final addition to moving. They were used for all sorts of things from battle to feast days. Notice that only the priests could blow them. The other interesting thing was that in battle, they were used to call God for help. Even in the trumpets, there was symbolism mixed in.

In terms of moving the camp of Israel, what we have here is all summary. We don't know how much in advance the "alarms" were made to give each camp time to prepare to move. It may be that when they saw the glory move away from the tabernacle they began making preparation. That definitely would have been visible.

Vs. 11-28 Here we go! I can just hear Willie Nelson standing there, as the tribes are passing by, singing, "On the Road Again."

V. 11 Notice when this happened. Remember the guys who were unclean and couldn't celebrate the Passover in the first month. This means that those men celebrated both the Passover and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month. The day after they finished, God moved them.

If you made a diagram of the tabernacle with the Levites around it and then surrounded by the other tribes, you get an idea of how they took off, led by Judah. Writing out their order helps give a good visual image of how they moved out.

I wonder how long this all took. People had to pack up their tents and find little Joe and Sarah playing with their friends. They had to load it on Nellie (the family cow), then you moved out three tribes as the Levites were working like crazy to tear down the tabernacle, besides getting their own stuff in order. How long does it take to move 6-10 million people? Do they walk in single file or a quarter mile wide? It must have taken forever. I think Willie would have gotten tired playing that song.

V. 17 Notice that the sons of Gershon and Merari traveled together after the camp of Judah. This would allow them time to set up the court and the tabernacle, before the Kohathites arrived with the furniture. Also, the camp of Judah would have been able to "set up a perimeter."

Vs. 29-32 Moses appeals for his (?) -in-law to go with, thinking they would soon be in the land. This guy had more names than Jason Bourne. Take a look at p. 226 of the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#) for an explanation that the word for "father-in-law" actually means "in-law" and that this guy was most likely Moses' brother-in-law. Apparently he went with them, but little did they know that Israel was not on its way to blessing.

Vs. 33-36 I don't know what to think of what Moses said when the cloud lifted and rested. He took great care for the people and took his position very seriously. God doesn't command him to do this, but I suppose with the signal of the trumpets, Moses, as a leader, wanted to motivate the people and focus their attention on the Lord. Anyway it's more gripping than, "Hi-ho, Silver, away!"

#### Numbers 11

Vs. 1-15 So, they finally move. The Promised Land is on the radar, and they know it is their destination. They have just seen wonder upon wonder, and the cloud is leading them. And they complain about the manna and want meat.

One of the main themes of both Numbers and Deuteronomy is that the sin of a few will affect the entire nation. We have seen the symbolism being laid in the things that make a person unclean and in the way lepers were to be treated. Now we will begin to see God showing them that the sin and rebellion of a few people can destroy the nation.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that the first step in this entire event was a few people complaining and then the attitude of complaint catching on around them. Symbolically, God dealt with it with a spreading fire. The judgment matched what they were doing to one another.

Vs. 4-6 I think their desire was valid. The expression of their desire was not. They could have asked God personally. They could have gone to Moses patiently. They could have prayed and spread prayer throughout the camp. I'm sure the meat would have come. In any case, once inside the land, they would have had anything they wanted.

Paul mentions this event in 1 Corinthians 10:10 *"And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer."* We should ask ourselves what was wrong with their complaining. Then we need to ask ourselves about our complaining. Is there a difference? Actually, I like complaining, but I'm getting better (at not complaining). If we see our lives, as disciples, as living out God's will every day, we realize that God is in charge of our circumstances, more than we are. The challenge is for us to live our lives accepting what God brings into our lives and responding in a way that shows we are His followers and children. Paul addresses grumbling one more time in Philippians 2:13-15, *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...*

The "rabble" refers to a mixed group of people, Jews and non-Jews, probably Egyptians who were sympathetic to the cause while they were still in Egypt. Now a year into the Exodus, living on manna, they were helping the Jews to grumble and be discontent. These people had been good to the Jews when it had to do with human injustice, but had no clue regarding the spiritual ramifications of the promise of Abraham, the promise to Adam and Eve and the destiny of the nation of Israel. Now, they were poison to the Jews. A few people complaining spread like gangrene through the camp. Many would now die because of the few.

As disciples, you would expect to find dissenting voices outside the church; but more often than not, it comes from the brethren (and sistren). I have seen churches ruined, pastors give up on ministry and groups of believers held hostage for decades, because of a few immature rabble rousers. Paul's words to the Corinthians, about their inability to see immaturity and "nice people" who were not believers, still hold true for us. *Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.* (1 Corinthians 15:33-34)

Vs. 7-9 They were now treating their daily bread, and its giver, with contempt. Not smart, or spiritual.

Vs. 10-15 It is hard to imagine the intense pressure on Moses. God was mad; Moses wasn't real happy; the people were standing at the doors of their tents weeping out loud. In a few days, Moses, in his thinking, went from success to utter failure. And in this pressure and sense of failure, he wanted help or death.

I've got to admit that I like Moses' poetic flair in his nervous breakdown.

Vs. 16-17 This is important enough to take note of. God was willing to go with the people and their needs. He waited for natural problems to arise before He moved and answered requests. Of course Moses needed help; but now, in a whiney sort of way, he was asking, and God was willing to provide. The provision of 70 elders on whom the Spirit would rest is a great thing.

Moses doesn't need to feel jealous, because they are provided out of Moses' own cry to God. Joshua will get a little bent, but God prepared Moses for this by letting Moses melt down. This isn't quite, but it resembles, the beginning of the office of prophet.

Again, for us as disciples, it isn't the emergency or the need that is bad, but it is what we personally do about it. Are we driven to our knees before a sovereign, loving God, or do we act in our strength or give up and complain?

Vs. 18-20 God is really not happy here. There was no better way to spit in God's face than to say they were better off in Egypt and to say they wanted flavorful food. They didn't fully grasp that God was in their presence, listening to them. If anyone had had any sense, they would have fallen on their faces and asked God for forgiveness. They definitely shouldn't have eaten without seeking forgiveness for their sins and giving thanks.

I had to laugh the first time I read v. 20. If saying, *until it comes out at your nostrils*, is a guy thing, then God is a guy.

Vs. 21-23 What is amazing here is that in the emotional stress of leading, Moses totally loses perspective. Why did he think this was his responsibility to feed them? Why would he think God would have a hard time providing meat? "Well, you know, the manna is sort of like...whatever. Meat comes from animals and you can't just conjure those up, can you?" Of course, God could. Moses himself is losing sight of who God is. If God created chicken on the day of creation, He could do it now. His hand had not lost its touch or "become shortened."

As disciples following our Lord in the harvest, we don't always see fruit. We often see some disappointment in those who profess Christ, but fall away. And we see people begin well as disciples, but settle into a harmless, ineffective lifestyle. It seems that God should at least be nice to us, because we're trying, and keep our cars running and our microwaves from dying. Well, Jesus said the good seed bore fruit "with patience," and part of the Father's pruning process is to direct the life flowing in us to be concentrated in places where the fruit will be produced. That means that the process of crying out to God and trimming our focus and honing our energy will always be part of following Him. He wants fruit more than we do. *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!* (Psalm 27:14)

### **Mark 14:1-21**

Vs. 1-2 Everyone knew the leaders were wanting to kill Jesus. It is interesting that they decided not to attempt doing anything during the Passover and feast week. But something will change that.

Vs. 3-9 This was the event that made Judas mad. In a way it is funny. I, myself, have met Christians who were more (self) righteous than Jesus. When Mary anointed Him and the disciples got all righteously religious and told Him what she did was a waste, Jesus told them to back off, that it was ok, that the poor would be there every day. They were trying to press Jesus into some kind of religious thinking that already existed. John 12 mentions that Judas was a thief and that what he said was motivated by wanting to get his hands on the money. Oddly enough, he was the "rabble" who got the other disciples complaining.

Just for trivia. This was the end of a very long Wednesday in the week before Jesus died. John seems to say that this event happened five days earlier; but if you notice the words in John 12:2, he is only referring to where the event took place, not when it took place. Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover, and that was the place (not the time) Mary anointed Jesus.

Vs. 10-11 Now the chief priests were praising God, because one of Jesus' disciples was a traitor; and they could, unexpectedly, kill Him.

Vs. 12-16 Jesus waited until the last possible second to send the disciples to find a place to celebrate the Passover. And it worked. It made a lasting impression that God could be trusted even if He makes us wait until, not only the last hour, but until our strength is failing and our hope is beginning to get strained. And Boom! There was a room and it was a good one. Tradition says this was the home of John Mark, the writer of this Gospel.

Vs. 17-21 I'll bet Peter and John were the only disciples who weren't asking Him, "*Is it I?*" The disciples never knew that Judas was the rat. Jesus' security in His Father allowed Him to show Judas an amazing kind of love. It was such a constant and sincere love, that the disciples never picked up on the fact that Jesus knew from the beginning who it was who would betray Him.

V. 21 Jesus knew who it was, but it was Judas who made the decision. You see both sovereignty and human responsibility here. Rather than question how they work together, it is easier to understand that God is amazingly loving, righteous and wise, and they do work together.

### **Psalm 51**

This is a great psalm of David, written after God spoke judgment on David, for what he did with Bathsheba and Uriah. There are lots of great verses here like v. 17. I have a couple general observations.

First, according to what we're reading in the OT, David should have been put to death for this, a couple of times over. God Himself spared David out of sheer grace. God forgives. There is no human sin He will not forgive, and that should be a comfort to us, not only in working with others, but also when we hear that tiny voice telling us we're as useful to God as a screen door on a submarine. We may sin, but we get up and keep on going, following Christ, receiving grace upon grace and forgiveness that goes beyond our guilt. And God will use us.

Second, I always have a hard time with the way David expresses himself in v. 4, as if his sin only affected God and not other people. This verse is true in terms of ultimate guilt; but if we have sinned against others, we can't use this verse as proof that we don't have to apologize or make restitution. In my experience I would say the rule of thumb is this, that if we have really harmed someone, we let *them* tell *us* what restitution looks like. We keep saying we're sorry, until they release us from that obligation. Too often, the guilty party forces the party they wronged to grant forgiveness, to get "themselves" off the hook, instead of lifting the pain and the injustice from the other person.

In this case, from what we will read later and the fact that David's family was ruined and his most trusted counselor rebelled against him and committed suicide in bitterness, I sense that David did not work with Bathsheba's family until they were satisfied. I don't really sense that his repentance went past God, into the families that he ruined. We'll talk more about this when we get to 2 Samuel 11. David was a great man, but he really destroyed himself in what he did and how he handled it.

Still, it's a great psalm. David was like us, blessed but weak. What the Spirit of God says here is true.

Vs. 1-2 David knew there was no appeal for what he had done. Only God could pardon Him, and then, only on the basis of totally unmerited kindness and mercy. Eventually the blood of Christ would be shed that could cover this. In faith, David is asking for pardon.

Vs. 3-4 Ultimately David could only be pardoned by God. His friends and his nation could look the other way but David's true guilt would remain. He needed to be pronounced free by God. Still, David did a lot of damage in many families. We have no evidence that he took care of those sins.

Vs. 5-12 Verse 5 is a strike against the idea that kids are born clean, without sin, like blank slates, and that it is our environment that teaches us to sin. The Lord shows in His Word that we are born with an incurable sin nature. Only God can cure us. Notice what David lost in vs. 8-12. This was serious and David never expected that his fling with Bathsheba could damage him spiritually. In a way, David never fully recovered.

Vs. 13-17 David often promised God that he would tell of God's deliverance and help. Psalm 40:1-10 states something like this too.

Vs. 18-19 At this point, David didn't know how the city and the nation would suffer for what he had done. Here at least it seems he realized that his sin might impact the nation and the city, so he is asking for God's protection and that Zion would prosper as a place that men would seek God and as a place where God would show mankind His favor.

### **Proverbs 10:31-32**

If you put these verses together it might look like this.

31The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, because 32the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable; but the perverse tongue will be cut off, because the mouth of the wicked only knows what is perverse.

## **MARCH 9**

### **Numbers 11:24-13:33**

When it rains, it pours. All of these events happened very near to each other. Even with the obvious presence of God in their midst, even with the signs of His power and blessing, fallen people still acted like fallen people. God's message to the people that the sin of a few affects everyone will become unforgettable for the entire generation of people who will enter the land.

Numbers 11:24-35

Vs. 24-30 This doesn't mean that Moses had less of the Spirit, but that the same kind of spirit was passed on to the 70 elders. These men were probably empowered like spiritual shepherds, to encourage the people in the Spirit.

V. 25 Whatever happened, it was visible. We have examples of this happening to people, especially in 1 Samuel 19:20-24. They didn't just prophesy; they went into a kind of trance or condition. The German word, "Verzückung," gives the idea of an involuntary kind of spasm. If you read the passage in 1 Samuel, you'll see that God did this to protect David. The people who had this happen to them were so incapacitated that they couldn't hunt for David. In this case, it probably looked like what happened on the day of Pentecost. These men were overcome and began speaking the Words of God and praising Him.

The implication of the Hebrew is that this was a one-time event.

V. 26 Apparently not all 70 elders made it to the tent. When the spirit came upon them, they prophesied, spoke the Word of God with strength and conviction to the people to direct them to follow God.

V. 28 We've met Joshua before, but now his father is named. It is no accident that we suddenly hear of Joshua in this situation. Today and tomorrow we'll hear more about Joshua.

What I find interesting is that Moses doesn't feel threatened, because this rose out of a genuine need that Moses begged for. His God-given desperation saved him from being closed and defensive in bringing on more leaders.

Vs. 31-36 The birds probably were not piled 2-3 feet high, but were so dense that they only flew that high and were very easy to catch. It would have been like a wacky video game, standing out in the middle of a field and having a low-flying flock head in your direction.

Vs. 33-35 In the plague, the idea here is that God took care of the people with the craving, who began the avalanche of carnality that "ate up" the camp. The timing factor is very interesting. They had it in their mouths, but didn't get to enjoy the food they craved. I'm sure some people were punished who got caught up in the sins of these other people. In v. 34 you have a note that tells you what they named that place. I'm willing to bet that as these people gathered, prepared and ate, there was no sense of repentance for their complaining and no thanks to God for His provision.

V. 35 God moved the people from that terrible place.

## Numbers 12

Vs. 1-2 So, we have heard nothing of Miriam since the Red Sea. Apparently in all of this, she was the instigator and jealousy was the motive. She used Moses' intermarriage as a tool to breed discontent with Aaron. Either Zipporah, Moses' wife, had died and Moses had remarried a Cushite (Egyptian), or they were finally taking Moses to task that his wife wasn't an Israelite. Aaron and Miriam would have both had true-blue Israelite spouses. The fact that Miriam is punished here shows that she was the real force behind the problem and discontent. Also, since God had recently put His Spirit on the 70 elders, she was jealous. Aaron probably was the "weak" accomplice just as he was with the golden calf.

V. 3 That Moses was "meek" didn't make him "weak." Meek would mean, "non-aggressively" strong. He didn't have to fight to feel secure, and in the following cases, it isn't weakness that makes him fall on his face. He realizes that the decisions people are making will bring God's wrath.

Vs. 5-8 It is interesting that God says He is the one who makes the choice of whom He talks to. It wasn't Moses' fault that God chose Moses. I'm sure, in a way, if Moses could have retired to a little chalet in the Alps, leaving someone else in charge, he would have done that, but God didn't give him that choice.

In a way, it is true with us as disciples; "success" is not our fault. It isn't even based on our talent or skills. God makes the choice. On the one hand, there is no room for pride, and on the other hand, there is no room for envy. When the disciples of John the Baptist complain to John about Jesus' growing popularity, *John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."* (John 3:27)

Notice that God tells them they should have been afraid to have spoken against Moses. They didn't respect him, and more disrespect was to follow.

Vs. 10-12 Apparently Miriam's appearance wasn't just white, but the reactions of Aaron and Moses indicate that she looked like she was *half eaten away*.

Vs. 13-16 Both Moses' reaction and God's response are very interesting. The entire nation had to wait seven days for Miriam. I'm sure word spread through the nation about what had happened. You would have hoped the people would have taken it to heart.

## Numbers 13

So far things haven't been pretty, and now it goes from bad to worse.

Vs. 1-3 The Lord says to send out spies. In Deuteronomy 1:21-22, Moses says it was the people's idea. I believe God simply said OK to the desire of the people. So, I think the idea originated

from the fear and uncertainty of the people, but God allowed them to send the spies to confirm for the people that the land was good.

Vs. 4-16 I don't know if they teach this children's song in Sunday school anymore, *Twelve men went to spy on Canaan, ten were bad and two were good*. We don't need to focus on the bad guys, just the good guys, and tomorrow we'll hear more.

Notice that Joshua is mentioned today in 11:28, 13:8 and 13:16. Based on 13:16 and Joshua's past history with Moses, I believe Joshua was the leader on their adventure. Moses changed his name from "salvation" to "Yahweh is salvation." The first century version of Joshua's name was "Jesus."

Vs. 17-29 Now just to put some of this in perspective, these men traveled together and talked together for 40 days. That should have brought some closeness. I've seen something like this happen in a group, oddly enough, of 12 men. Based on what I saw there, I'll suggest this. Not all of the spies were bad men, but they were not men of faith. They were swayed by the majority in the group. There were men who could see the merit of both sides of the argument when they sat at night and talked. Some of these men certainly were friendly to the point of view of Caleb and Joshua. But when it came down to the decision, it was rooted in fear and practicality, not in the reality of an awesome God. I'll bet, when the ten men spoke to the multitude of people, Joshua and Caleb were surprised, hurt, shocked, to hear what came out of some of their mouths.

V. 22 Notice the mention of Hebron. This will become the property of Caleb and the possession of Judah. In the future David will reign in Hebron for seven years as the king of Judah, before he eventually becomes the king of the entire nation. Hebron was also the home of the Anakites, who were giants and would make big targets for Caleb.

V. 30 We are introduced to Caleb first in 13:6, and now he steps to center stage. Caleb *quieted the people*. He was a man of great faith, strength and confidence in God, but he was only one man.

Vs. 31-33 So what was the real problem? Giants. You would think that with all they saw in Egypt, this would be nothing. With God, giants were just big targets and easier to hit. God will remind them of these words about giants.

I have seen something like this happen in church groups. If you want to see a good possibility or direction be defeated, allow the deciding group to grow full of people with little faith and then allow criticism to grow, saying, "Well, that is a valid point." The voices of faith and confidence in God get drowned out in the laughter.

This is another reason why Jesus kept the core of His disciples small. The core of disciples making disciples has to be of men and women who deeply love Christ and will follow Him in the harvest. His Word and His commission have to be their burning passion. While it is attractive to move fast and invite everyone to be involved, the reality is that faith matures slowly.

Here, God isn't laughing. If you want a good man to use as a model of a disciple, look at Caleb. Tomorrow we'll read more. Just as trivia, notice the tribes that Caleb and Joshua come from. Remember the last words of Jacob. Tomorrow will be a very, very sad day for Israel.

### **Mark 14:22-52**

Vs. 22-25 This is the Lord's Supper and the sign of the new covenant. The *blood of the covenant* wouldn't flow until Jesus was on the cross. The time when Jesus will enjoy this celebration will be future and probably when He establishes His Millennial Kingdom on earth after the Tribulation.

Vs. 26-42 This talk began in the upper room and must have continued until they reached the *Mount of Olives*. Jesus told them they would *fall away* in order to help them cope and hold on to

their faith after they did fall away. Also, the three disciples eventually recovered from their failure to wait with Jesus. They kept falling asleep, but the joy of the resurrection must have erased their guilt. Peter's "fall" was deeper, and he needed Jesus to pull him up. Notice that Jesus spoke to Peter. It is probably no coincidence that Peter fell asleep three times, denied Him three times and was asked by Jesus to confess his love three times.

Vs. 43-50 I still think it's funny that it will take reading Luke's account, before we realize that Jesus healed/ reattached the cut-off right ear. In artistic language you could say that Peter "Van Gogh-ed" the man, although for Vincent it was the left earlobe, and for the slave of the high priest, it was the entire right ear.

Vs. 51-52 The young man who ran away naked is supposed to be Mark. John Grassmick gives an interesting idea of what might have happened here on p. 181 of the Bible Knowledge Commentary-NT. According to him, the mob might have stopped at the upper room first and found that Jesus and the disciples were gone. Mark might have been sleeping and woke when the mob showed up and left. Apparently, the little rich kid just grabbed the sheet he was sleeping in and followed. The rest is history.

It is interesting that all the disciples got away. It is only here that we realize that the mob was looking to grab others, too. Maybe the sword play played a role.

## **Psalm 52**

It is sort of hard to think of these as songs sung in worship. To understand what had happened you need to read 1 Samuel 22:9-23. Doeg was a real dog. The soldiers at least had the faith and sense not to kill the priests of the Lord, but not Doeg the Edomite. He launched right in and killed the priests and their families. God's judgment on Doeg is seen to be "typical" of how He will judge all evildoers.

V. 1 Notice the contrast between the two lines of this verse.

Vs. 2-5 For many years David would have to endure the lying of those who ruled under King Saul. This is addressed to Doeg, but there were many others.

Vs. 6-7 Again, notice the contrast between these verses.

Vs. 8-9 David knew that in spite of the lies, hatred and violence aimed at him, *the steadfast love of God* would not fail. Today, David was content to wait. David was just now beginning to run from Saul, and his lying had gotten others in trouble. David would be on the run and live in hiding for many years. Slowly David would learn to wait and overcome his fear by being secure in the love of God.

As disciples following the Lord in the harvest, the hardest thing we will ever do is to wait on the Lord as He brings us through a season of pruning and leads us on to the next season of fruitfulness.

## **Proverbs 11:1-3**

Imagine that v. 1 is a symbolic principle and the next two verses expand on that symbolism.

*False balance* = pride and crookedness.

*Just weight* = humility and integrity.

Humility and integrity come from having a just "weight" to understand and weigh life. That "just measure" is the love of God and the Word of God.

## MARCH 10

### Numbers 14:1-15:16

#### Numbers 14

Vs. 1-10 When we read this, we have to remember that we are no better than the people here. I'm often tempted to think of these people or the people in Jesus' day as some lower category of dumb humanity. At times, I see this kind of irrationality in me, and being a pastor, I've definitely seen it in churches. It is tough for us, even with the Spirit, to live with raw obedience and faith rooted in God that is constant and enduring from day to day and from situation to situation. You can't explain this irrationality with any word other than "sin." It is a small word with power that staggers the imagination.

V. 5 After the people made their decision in v. 4, *Moses and Aaron fell on their faces*. They knew what was coming and there was only one place to appeal for mercy for the people. The people of this generation did not see the cause/effect link between sin and punishment, especially as it had to do with the whole congregation suffering for the sins of the few. The next generation would learn this lesson.

Vs. 6-10 Joshua and Caleb understood what was happening, too, and jumped in to try to speak sense to the crowd and direct them to faith in following God. The decision of the congregation to stone Joshua and Caleb was the last straw.

This is probably a good time to share something with you that is kind of exciting for me. Back in Genesis 49 when Jacob blesses his sons, as expected, he gave Joseph a huge blessing. The blessing of Joseph would be transferred to Joe's son, Ephraim, whom Jacob blessed as the firstborn. But what is surprising is Jacob's blessing on Judah. Looking at the proportion of text, Judah really gets a "lion's" share. So, how did the blessing of Jacob to his sons play out? God's blessing is often seen in giving leadership. Look closely at the tribes Joshua and Caleb come from. Do you think that it's a coincidence that these men will be two of the leaders who will lead the nation into Canaan in about 39 years?

V. 10 God moved in to protect Joshua and Caleb. Now He will issue judgment.

Vs. 11-38 We could spend a couple of days in this section, but it's ok not to, since you'll read this again next year and maybe someone will preach on it in between. You'll learn a lot about Moses in this section. You'll learn more about God. As disciples reading this account, we can learn about ourselves and working with others. All of what we're reading applies to Christians, and Paul refers to this history in dealing with the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 10 as a very solemn warning.

Vs. 11-19 God tested Moses' heart and Moses passed.

Notice in vs. 18 and 19 Moses refers back to his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, when God revealed Himself to Moses in a very deep way (Ex. 33:12-34:8). Notice that in Exodus God says that He would make His goodness pass before Moses. That understanding of God's character, restated here, is what helped Moses stand secure as a leader for the people in this time of crisis.

Vs. 20-25 Wow! God pardoned, but boy did He punish. What's amazing is that out of all the men older than 20, only Joshua and Caleb will enter the land. This was a total, heartfelt rebellion of everyone. Except for a few men, in 40 years the oldest man walking into the Promised Land would be only 60.

(One note is that it doesn't say that the Levites fell under this punishment. They weren't represented by the spies. Aaron's son Eleazar does enter the land. Eleazar would have had to have been much older than twenty when this happened.)

At this point they were on a highway that led from Egypt to Canaan. Now God would be leading them back into the wilderness.

Vs. 26-35 The complaint of the people becomes their punishment and the children they used in their argument will inherit the promise. What interesting years these will be. Someone has figured that for this generation to die in the wilderness, there would have to be 400+ funerals a day for the next 38 years. They would be living in a camp of death. The lessons of following God would be emphasized by the daily mourning in the camp for the ones who rebelled against God. Every day the people would understand that the sins of a few can lead to the death of thousands.

V. 34 When we add this up later, the entire 40 years will be measured from the time the people left Egypt, which would have been the entire time they were in the wilderness. Actually, the first thing the people did when they left Egypt was to complain and want to go back.

Vs. 36-38 It is interesting that God immediately punished the 10 spies. At the same time, two very spiritual men were honored by God.

Vs. 39-45 This is kind of typical and very sad. Rather than repenting and praying and seeking God, they disobey and expect the Lord to bless them.

God knew this was going to happen. So, what do you learn about Him? God promised to lead them into the land and it was a valid offer. They could see His love and His power every day. But these people were not ready and they proved it. The people were judged rightly for their sin and rebellion. Now God uses this entire generation as a lesson for the next generation to make them ready to enter the land. But what an education. The next generation learns the lesson, but at the great cost of lives lost and time lost. God works the same way today. His use of time and people and their rebellion is righteous, but outside of our ability to understand.

For us as disciples, we need to understand that God's plans can't be frustrated. He knew what was going to happen and used the rebellion for good. Even the disasters and our service for Him are known by Him. Regardless of what happens in our service for Him, our challenge is to follow Him as if following is the only goal, and not to be eaten up with considerations of time, money and success. Our expectations regarding things like "success" and "time" and "return on investment" don't mean much to God. Jesus defined success as, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.* God's power has not been diminished. His plan since the Fall has not changed. If we can grasp that, as we follow Christ in the harvest, it will give us a lot more peace and security. Imagine the frustration of guys like Joshua and Caleb who loved God and had the faith, but now because of 10 guys everything was ruined. But they waited with God and followed Him every day. If we are following Christ as disciples on earth, our home is in heaven and our life and times are in His hands. We are servants working for Him here, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. That's got to be enough.

Numbers 15:1-16

Now, believe it or not, we are in a time warp. We have no idea when God said this to Moses. It could very well be that 10-30 years have passed between chapters 14 and 15. Chapter 20 will take place on the first month of the 40th year. We know that, because soon afterward Aaron will die, and the date of his death is given in Numbers 33:38.

This is the reason why chapter 15 goes on as if nothing happened in chapter 14. During the 40 years of wandering, the new generation is learning and absorbing the law. They are becoming a nation. These commands are an addition to the sacrifices for a fellowship offering. Ironically, these were offerings of thanks and celebration to please the Lord when the people expressed their joy for being brought into the land. After chapter 14, it is ironic that the Lord would teach a new

generation how to express thanks in their sacrifices as they were being prepared to come into the Promised Land.

### **Mark 14:53-72**

Vs. 55-59 In the name of God, they were seeking testimony from liars so they could justify killing Jesus, but it wasn't working. How frustrating for them.

Vs. 60-65 You can only be awed by the power of sin. Jesus' words in v. 62 are clear.

V. 64 All who were there condemned Jesus, meaning that both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who were members of the council, hadn't been invited.

Vs. 66-72 Notice how much space Mark gives to this. Mark was that failed servant who ran away from Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. After Barnabas restored Mark and got him back into ministry, Mark became the companion of Peter. Peter had also been a failed servant. I'm sure the reason that God made sure Peter's story was in all the Gospels is for us. Peter failed and yet later became a great follower in the harvest. For us too, it is never too late. The Lord is always standing before us, ready to forgive and restore and welcome us to follow Him in the harvest.

### **Psalm 53**

Vs. 1-3 Paul quotes from these verses in Romans 3:10-12, showing that all men are under the power of sin. What an interesting psalm to read today, after reading about Israel and Jesus' trial. This applies to all men, and we would be just as bad if not for God's grace to us.

I was thinking about the fool saying, *There is no God*. I have never seen anything explode and produce nearly perfect spheres. Everything we have that is round was made by someone. Yet we look into the sky and see the sun and moon and think that these were produced by an explosion. How silly.

Vs. 4-5 As David wrote this, he was most likely still running from King Saul. Those who were saying in their hearts that God didn't exist were the people doing this. That tells me that they probably "said" God didn't exist, not so much by their words, but by their actions. They thought they could do evil (like Saul having Doeg kill the priests) and get away with it.

V. 6 With the promises God had made to Abraham and had made to David personally (Samuel's anointing of David to be king), David knew that in spite of his hardship, God would bring justice to victory and that all would rejoice.

### **Proverbs 11:4**

Amen.

## **MARCH 11**

### **Numbers 15:17-16:40**

I hope you're planning to celebrate the progress you're making reading your one-year Bible. If you do celebrate on St. Pat's day, that day is the renumbering of the people before they go into the land. The first word in Numbers 26:5 is *Reuben*. Wouldn't that taste good? A McReuben and a Shamrock Shake?

Just like yesterday, we have no idea where these chapters fit into the years of sitting and wandering in the wilderness. Forty years is a long time to sit in the desert. Israel would have become a phenomenon in the world. All the nations would have known about these millions of people. The nation was being formed day by day, but somewhere in this waiting, as God was giving supplementary guides to the sacrifices, discontent was brewing.

## Numbers 15:17-40

Vs. 17-21 The law of the dough is a perpetual yearly celebration in remembrance of God bringing them into the land. Paul alludes to this in Romans 11:16, *If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches*. If you read that verse in Romans you'll notice that it is also said in a sense of fulfillment and celebration. Here, God is focusing the people on the entrance into the land. It could be that the time of that event was drawing near.

Vs. 22-26 These guidelines are what a group of people, like a family or town, was supposed to do when they found out that they had been making a mistake; for example, forgetting to leave the corners of the fields unharvested for the poor. Once they realized their mistake, they were to seek God's forgiveness as a community.

The idea here, emphasized in what they had just seen and were living with each day, was that the sins of a few could cause harm to everyone. Once in the land they would make mistakes, but the minute they realized the mistake, they were to seek forgiveness and renewal.

Vs. 27-29 This is the same law, but for an individual. This isn't like a speeding ticket. This is self-enforced repentance and correction. In this case, a person realized they had sinned, without intending to, and that this could bring some judgment on himself or others.

Even today for us in our churches, it is hard for us to grasp that the sins of a few can lead to many people being disappointed or harmed. God was underscoring this principle for Israel, and we'll see this in action at the end of Joshua.

Vs. 30-31 God does mention a "high-handed" sin; that is, the person knows he's violating and could care less. In this case he wouldn't be shown grace or mercy. It is interesting that it says, *because he has despised the Word of the Lord*.

Vs. 32-36 And here is a case in point. Now, if this person were in danger of freezing, or needed the sticks to save a life or get an animal out of a pit, he would have been let off the hook. This person must have stood out like a sore thumb, since all Israel kept the Sabbath at this point. It was simply a disregard of the Sabbath, probably because looking for sticks to burn during the week was easier to do on the Sabbath, since everyone was staying at home on the Sabbath. There would be no one else looking for sticks. This was sort of like shopping at Wal-Mart© at midnight.

Notice that there was a private and then a public process.

Vs. 37-41 This is very interesting. All people were to sew tassels on the corners of all of their garments. And I might add, for all time. The purpose of the tassel was to remind them to obey the Word of the Lord and to be holy to the Lord. Not only would this be a visual reminder for them, but everyone in the world would notice this. Imagine what they said in Paris? Again, all of life in Israel was symbolic of God's special love and relationship to His people, and everything they did, each day, had a symbolic value to help keep them on track.

In a very interesting way, God has done this for us, too, as disciples. I gave my life to Christ in July-August of 1975. I have never, for an hour, forgotten that I belong to Christ. I never imagine that I'm not with God and that I can't instantly begin talking to Him. I have never looked at lost people and not felt the need to talk to them and not realized that they were lost. I have never *not* thought that reading my Bible every day was a vital necessity in my life. I have never thought it would be ok not to pray. I mean, you know the Lord, so how can you not talk to Him?

Now, it doesn't mean I've done everything well; but the daily visual reminder has been there, and active, even when I've been disobedient. It is the Spirit. I'm sure when I get to heaven and meet Him, the Spirit will say, "Dan, I can't tell you what a challenge you were. If I weren't God, I'd

have given up. In fact, one time, you almost made me swear." (In Milwaukee, all good Catholic parents tell their kids, often, "You're enough to make an angel swear." Growing up, I heard that quite a bit and it worked its way into my theology. ☺) But thank God that the Spirit is God. If I've done anything worthwhile and if I've grown at all, it has been because of the daily reminders that the living Spirit of God has given to me through the Word.

Numbers 16:1-40

The time of waiting and disappointment drew some people to the Lord in humility and patience. Those with rebellious hearts had their hearts exposed. If you listen to what Korah and Dathan say, their real discontent was with Moses' leadership. The disappointment at Kadesh-barnea didn't make them see God clearer. It made them blinder. All of this was exposing the hearts of people who didn't desire to follow God.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that there were both Levites and Reubenites involved in this. If you look at the chart you drew as to where the different tribes camped, you'll see that the Reubenites and the Kohathites camped next to each other on the south side of the tabernacle. The Reubenites may have thought they were the tribe of the firstborn of Jacob (but were not). The Kohathites had the honor of carrying the ark of the covenant and the other holy furniture of the Holy Place. In any case, it wasn't an excuse for them to lose their minds.

V. 3 Korah's words make me think that Korah was a fighting fundy (fundamentalist). Now if you are saying this to a dead church structure, as men did at different periods of time (Luther, Calvin, the Plymouth Brethren), informing them of the right of every man to forge his own relationship with God and to understand the Word for himself, that is OK and "wunderbar." But if you are standing up in your local church where everyone is a believer, and they're not in doctrinal error, and you're telling the leaders that you don't recognize their leadership because you have a Bible just like they do and you're just as equipped to be a leader, you might be Korah. I've met several Korahs, eyeball to eyeball. What fun. And I've seen a church, that was reaching lost people, destroyed by them.

Notice the words, *You have gone too far*.

Vs. 4-11 Moses hears this and knows what the Lord will do. He immediately pleads for mercy before the Lord. This is not Moses protecting himself. Moses knows that this will hurt the nation and many will suffer, being swept along with this man's influence. More pastors and leaders need to be on their faces before the Lord more often, when the flames of discord are still small.

V. 6 Moses knows he doesn't need to defend himself. This is seen by the Lord, and the Lord is the one who decides. Think of how often Paul talks about God's choice in gifting us for ministry (Eph. 4:7ff, Rom. 12:3-6, 1 Cor. 12:11). It is God's choice if one person has the gift and another doesn't. Korah didn't get that memo, but it should have been obvious to him that if God never talked to him, that was God's choice, not Moses' fault.

V. 7 Moses repeats *you have gone too far*, back to Korah.

V. 9 Notice the words to Korah, *Is it too small a thing...*

V. 11 That the descendants of Aaron were chosen to be priests was not Aaron's fault. God made the choice. Moses had just told everyone who thought they were "special" to show up before the Lord with his censer, and God would decide.

Vs. 12-15 This was now addressing the two families of the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram. They took Moses' own words, *is it a small thing*, and accused Moses of making himself king and cheating the people.

Vs. 16-19 So, Korah the Levite leads 250 leading men of Israel from all tribes to come and act as priests before the Lord. What was he thinking? And the entire nation gathered to see what would happen. And then God appeared in glory.

Vs. 20 -24 The Lord recognized this rebellion and unbelief as typical of the entire congregation of adults. Moses and Aaron *fell on their faces*, again, before the Lord, pleading for the congregation. If you remember, in Genesis, Abraham did something like this pleading for Lot when he was told Sodom would be destroyed.

Vs. 25-35 So, while Aaron was at the tabernacle with the Lord and the men who would not accept his leadership, Moses went to confront Dathan and Abiram. Apparently their tents and the tent of Korah were close to each other.

We should all be glad God doesn't do this anymore. It might make church discipline easier, but our churches would be emptier.

Vs. 36-40 This story will continue into tomorrow, but it is interesting to see that God uses the metal from the censers to plate the altar as a symbol that He has chosen Aaron and his sons to serve Him in the Holy Place and to burn incense. It was also a warning of rebellion. When the people came into the court to offer their sacrifices, they would see the altar plated with these censers. An interesting note here is that a very good king of Israel will violate this in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26:16-23 and end his life as a leper. He was popular, but he was proud. When he came into the temple to offer incense like a priest, the priests opposed him. Uzziah burned with anger toward the priests and God judged him. He should have read his Bible. That's why this warning was recorded.

The tragedy in this story is something that applies to us, too. Everyone in Israel was chosen. Everyone had been rescued from Egypt. Everyone had a message to tell a "non-Jew" about the one true God. In not appreciating that degree of "chosenness," and seeking something else, or something more, they were actually admitting they didn't appreciate what they had been given. Does that sound like something that can happen to a disciple?

We are all chosen to be ambassadors of Christ, not pastors or teachers. Our mission is to a lost world, not to have our voices recognized above, or among, other voices. We are all to function as the church outside that building we call the church. The testimony we give to a lost world is actually, *that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy*. (Romans 15:9) When we no longer appreciate God's mercy to us, and we have our eyes set on other things, we no longer have anything to say to a lost world, and therefore we don't. As disciples, we are all chosen and we are all blessed in Christ. That "church" thing that happens is merely meant to be a clearing in the harvest where you, tired and weary, come in from the harvest, to get your feet washed, your heart strengthened and your vision refocused on your Savior and mission. Then you go back out. And those servants, who washed and strengthened and served you, go back out too; but God has gifted them, along with their work in the harvest, to serve you too. "Church" isn't supposed to give us status as an organization of personalities. It is a clearing in the field to serve the harvesters. Accept your God-given mission with humility and grace.

I was reading this passage this morning and it speaks to my heart. *As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.* (Mark 5:18-20)

We are who the Lord makes us, and our message is what He has done and what He has done for us.

## Mark 15

Vs. 1-15 Notice how often Jesus is referred to as *the King of the Jews*. Pilate hated the Jews. His palace was on the coast in Caesarea. He was only here grudgingly to oversee crowd control during the Passover. In order for the Jews to have a charge against Jesus that was worthy of death under the Romans, it had to have something to do with opposing Roman government. The Jews had to have insinuated that Jesus was calling Himself a king. Pilate picked up on this, created the title and kept using it against the Jewish leaders.

The fact that Pilate didn't want to condemn Jesus and had no legal grounds would have been important to the Roman believers to whom this Gospel was written.

Vs. 16-20 This is the second time Jesus was beaten. Humanly speaking, it explains why He couldn't carry His cross and why He died so quickly. On the spiritual side, Jesus said that He had full control as to when He laid down His life. When His work was done, He gave up His spirit.

V. 21 Mark mentions Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus. The believers in Rome, to whom this was written, must have known A&R.

Mark was probably there with the apostle John, close at hand, to witness everything and hear the words of those who passed by and taunted Jesus.

V. 25 Only Mark mentions that Jesus was crucified at the third hour. For the Jews, 6 a.m. was hour 0, so the third hour would have been 9 a.m. The Romans began counting at midnight, so in John 19:14 you have the end of Jesus' trial with Pilate happening at the 6th hour, or 6 a.m., according to Roman time. From the verdict to the crucifixion it took three hours.

V. 32 I would not have wanted to be the guys who said this.

V. 38 The curtain being torn from top to bottom makes you think of the stroke of an angelic sword, even if you're not a Frank Peretti fan.

V. 40 Notice that Mark expected his readers to know James and Jose. Salome is the mother of the apostles James and John. Salome is the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary, who was on hand and spoken to by Jesus from the cross. Mark doesn't mention Mary by name, but she was definitely there and I think she is being referred to as the mother of James and Jose. James and Jose would then be the apostles James and Jude, Jesus' brothers, whose letters appear toward the end of the New Testament and were known as apostles to the Romans.

V. 43 Joseph was part of the Sanhedrin, like Nicodemus, and like Nick, not a part of this crime. He needed courage to step out like this. It is interesting that Mark, the fallen servant, mentions Joseph, the fearful, secret disciple finding courage out of love for Jesus. Look at John's harsh note about Jesus' secret disciples in John 12:42-43. Joseph was one of these.

V. 44 Only Mark mentions Pilate getting confirmation from the centurion. The Roman readers would have known that Jesus was pronounced dead by the Roman authorities. Normally it took hours, sometimes days, for a crucified person to die. To speed things up they would break the legs. But again, there is both a physical and spiritual way to understand why Jesus died so quickly.

One side note here, I'm not sure who organized the order of the books of the Bible, besides God. But it is genius to begin the year reading through one Gospel after the next. There is the repetition of the first three, sort of keeping the images fresh, adding to each other in small ways. Then you get the Gospel of John, which is very unique, yet adds to the events you've already read three times. As disciples, I can't think of a better way to begin the year. And, we will end the year in Revelation with Jesus on a throne, and this mess put to rest.

## Psalm 54

The history behind this psalm is that David was in the early days of his years of running from Saul. David had just received some encouragement, but now heard that these people, the Ziphites, were trying to turn him in. Yet the Lord was faithful and David and his people narrowly escaped. (1 Samuel 23:14-29)

Vs. 1-2 By now we should be used to seeing David crying out to God. God was actually teaching David how to do this.

V. 3 This is aimed at the Ziphites.

Vs. 4-5 This is what kept David sane and helps us too. David made the Lord his hope and he left "vengeance" to God.

Vs. 6-7 This is all that God really desires - our hearts and to tell others how He has helped and delivered us.

## Proverbs 11:5-6

I read all of this about *righteousness* and realize that "my righteousness" is only the result of the pestering of the Spirit within me, directing this stubborn heart to bow before the love and Word of God.

## MARCH 12

### Numbers 16:41-18:32

Numbers 16:41-50

Vs. 41-43 Until now, Korah's rebellion seems to have been a small problem involving the tribes of Levi and Reuben. Now we see that all the other tribes became infected by the criticisms against Moses and Aaron. The charge they brought against Moses defies all reason. Moses didn't open up the earth and swallow those families, and it wasn't Moses that brought fire out of the tabernacle to consume the 250 would-be priests.

But I've seen this in churches, too. People will not recognize God's working or submit themselves to leadership but will instead destroy churches and neglect the harvest. I don't think we are any different than these people. Look at how often Paul had to tell believers to submit to God's choice in giving gifts. Without submission to Jesus and taking up our cross, as people called to die, following Him in the harvest, we could all end up like this. This is why we constantly, every day, need to be in the Word, allowing the Spirit to "adjust" us.

When they faced off against Moses and Aaron, the cloud moved. Didn't they see the cloud?

Vs. 44-46 Moses and Aaron now both *fell on their faces*. They knew this was going to cost people their lives. Moses somehow understood that Aaron needed to get into the masses and make atonement for them.

Vs. 47-49 It is interesting what the "right" man with a censer could do. I'm sure God made a point in this that Aaron was the man whom He had chosen. Apparently Aaron ran through the streets of this tent city spreading the incense (symbolically, prayers) throughout the camp. At one point Aaron was standing between dead people and living people. It is hard to imagine that 14,700 people died on one day. And it was all the result of being infected by the discontentment of a few.

Numbers 17

This chapter sets the cause of the previous rebellions to rest as God Himself takes care of the problem, stating this in v. 5.

As mentioned yesterday, it seems that whenever there is an organization, we crave the lead roles. This is true in the church in spite of Christ being the Head and in spite of the church's mission being that of reaching a dying world. We are still caught up with what we think of each other and who is the leader. *God's choices* in gifting and giving one person more visibility than another don't seem important to us. We look at the organization and forget the God who owns it. They forgot the cloud, although it was in plain view.

With Israel, and even with us, God gives gifts/offices. He makes the choice. Each of us is to live and serve according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to us (Romans 12:3). God gives and assigns and orders. We either go with it or mess it up.

God would now confirm the choice He had made again. Twelve staffs representing each tribe would be put between the altar and the Holy Place. You see what happened to Aaron's staff. It was a class "A" miracle, and the people couldn't blame it on Moses.

Vs. 12 and 13 are the reaction of the people to their own rebellion and as a result you'll notice that 18:1 begins with *so*.

Numbers 18

Vs. 1-7 So, in the context of protecting the people, God clarified the special relationship of the priests and the Levites. Aaron and his family were to protect the people. The Levites were given to Aaron and his family to help them do this. Notice the mentions of *keep guard* and *gift*.

Vs. 8-20 In this section notice the words, *gift*, *given*, and *shall be yours*. These laws also show the privilege of Aaron and his sons having their needs met through the offerings and sacrifices brought to the tabernacle.

Vs. 21-32 This now was the privilege of the Levites. Notice that with the Levites and Aaron, God was their inheritance on earth. They were to serve and God would supply. This was all commanded by God but it ran on faith. If the people of the nation loved God and saw the sacrifices as important in their relationship to God, and if they obeyed the Lord, and if they understood that God wanted them to come to Him through the ministry of Aaron, then all was well. If not, they would look at Aaron and the Levites as "living off" them, as if by charity.

Notice that the Levites were to tithe, too. They were to give the best when they tithed. Just like the people were not supposed to hold back, the Levites were also to give the best that they were given, to the Lord for the priests.

Some people think that Cain's sin was not that he offered a sacrifice of his fields instead of an animal offering, but that the fruit and grains he offered were not the best. Instead of giving the best of his fruit, he gave the wormy stuff that he wouldn't have eaten anyway.

One more thing regarding these offerings and tithes - in Malachi these offerings become a major issue. The people brought what was sick and blighted; because, hey, times are hard and a blind animal is better than no animal, right? And the priests accepted it because, hey, they had to eat, too. Obviously God didn't agree with them.

This principle of tithing extends over to the NT. You see Paul mentioning the command the Lord gave, *that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel*. (Read 1 Cor. 9.) Again, this is God's choice for things. If we see the Lord and the harvest as the center of our lives, then it all works. Also, the ministry of Ephesians 4:11-16 is very important and dependent on God giving certain men to the church, those men being supported and the people submitting to God in following them. There is a lot of faith involved in this too. If we are not here to be slaves of our Lord Christ, we are in trouble. If we think "church" means something other than binding together to serve Christ in the harvest, we get in trouble. I was in a church where people said that both of my predecessors were lazy and never put in an honest day's work. In the file

drawers, I found time sheets from them, logging in 55-hour work weeks. The real issue was that the people "owned" the church, the building, to meet their needs. They weren't getting what they paid for. What they really wanted was for themselves, so they could stay isolated on a hill. Both "lazy" pastors burned out.

As disciples we must understand that God left us here on earth on purpose. We could all have been taken into heaven, "safe at home" the minute we trusted Christ. The reason we are left here is to serve our Lord by following Him in the harvest. We have no right not submitting to Him or to the structures He has set up to get this done. Obviously not all churches are doing the job, but we don't reject church or judge those who try to lead them. We still need to obey Him and find a church where we can work in the harvest. When Paul wrote to the Philippians notice how often *witness* and *being of one mind* are mentioned. The Church is to strengthen the harvesters, working together to glorify the Father, by bearing much fruit and so proving that we are Christ's disciples.

## Mark 16

Vs. 1-8 In Mark's customary style, chapter 16 is short and crisp. Jesus is raised; the angels say to go to Galilee; there are appearances and then the Great Commission and Jesus' ascension. All the highlights and no detail.

V. 7 Do you remember why the meeting in Galilee was significant? It was because of the Great Commission.

Vs. 9-20 Now, welcome to one of the biggest problems in the New Testament. This section of Mark doesn't seem to be in the original first edition of the Gospel of Mark. In a nutshell, the best, earliest manuscripts don't have these verses. Also, the Greek doesn't seem to match up in style, word usage and grammar. If you want a fuller explanation of this, read [The Bible Knowledge Commentary - NT](#), pp. 193-194.

Yet, since it has been in most of the later manuscripts and was accepted by the group of church fathers that established the canon, we are probably safe to quote it. Just for your information, the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 is a similar problem.

Also, what is said in this ending is verified by the other Gospels. It is a little different, but that might actually show it is authentic. I would assume that either Mark or Peter added the ending years later. Mark's Gospel is said to be the earliest Gospel, written sometime before 54 A.D. Maybe later in his life, Mark got tired of people asking him why he ended the story so abruptly, and so he quickly wrote an ending on separate paper that went with some of the manuscripts but not with others. We can ask the Lord when we get to heaven.

On the other hand, if this is one of the most severe NT textual problems, it's really nothing at all. Everything written here is validated by the other Gospels.

Vs. 9-11 This is exactly what we find in the other Gospels, especially the doubt of the eleven.

V. 12 Mark alludes to the guys on the road to Emmaus. Luke will give the rest of the story.

Vs. 15-16 Jesus says, *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*. The message went out first to Jerusalem. Baptism wasn't necessary for salvation, but it did supply a visual proof of true faith. Peter will say something similar to this in 50 days when 3000 people will claim allegiance through baptism. In doing this these Jews would be proclaiming the name of Jesus, whom some of them had denounced, and whose name was a cause for them to be thrown out of the synagogues in Jerusalem. Baptism has always been symbolic of death with Christ and our public identification with Him, the coming King. It has never been necessary for salvation. Notice also on the negative side of that verse, not believing is

the only cause of condemnation. Baptism doesn't save, but in that culture, it sure did show who was really a disciple.

Vs. 17-18 Notice the accompanying signs. Then notice the key to this in v. 20. The signs confirmed the message. These men had no Bible to point to like we do. How the signs substantiated their word is easy to see in Acts.

I'm not wanting to be divisive here, but just making an observation. Today, it is politically incorrect to disagree with the statement, "all the gifts seen in the book of Acts are normative for today and are still in use." I don't buy that. To say that God can still do these things is fine. But the special nature of the formation of the church, like the formation of the nation of Israel in the OT, has to be given some honest evaluation.

Do we have people getting snakebites and still living all the time? Is there anyone today, whose shadow falling across a sick man heals him? Can God still do this? Yes. Does God give any of us that ability? No. The time of the formation of Israel and the formation of the church were very special times. God used wonders and special exceptions to how things normally go. For example, in Acts you see people who have accepted Christ but hadn't yet received the Spirit, until Jews from Jerusalem showed up to lay hands on them. God did this so that the Jews could see that Samaritans were being given the Spirit. It was a special visual aid to help the Jewish Christians, at that time, get over their racial prejudice. I think that was only for that time, not now.

### **Psalm 55**

The intro to this psalm says, "with stringed instruments." It should read, "with stressed instruments." ☺

David is expressing a deep sense of betrayal here. Some think that this might have to do with Absalom's rebellion and Ahithophel's betrayal. Maybe. But David was a son-in-law of King Saul and had many friends in the palace. Everyone David knew who was close to Saul, except Jonathan, betrayed David. Either situation would fit. My personal feeling is that I don't think David wrote too much after he hurt himself with Bathsheba.

Vs. 1-8 When we read this we need to remember that God is OK with our needs, our weaknesses and our sufferings. It doesn't mean we have sinned or are far from Him. This is what God uses to draw us to Him. He wants us to cry out. He let David go through this, so it could be expressed to us.

Vs. 9-15 In this betrayal, there is a connection to Jesus being betrayed by someone close to Him. When you see Jesus at the Passover supper, He is saddened because of Judas. Jesus doesn't express Himself quite like this, but He does warn Judas that he would wish he were never born if he betrayed Him.

Vs. 16-19 This is what God was teaching David. This is what He teaches us also. We need Him more than we know. My heart is encouraged with these verses saying that we can cry to the Lord and He will hear us.

Vs. 20-21 When we are suffering because of others and they seem to be prospering, that makes it doubly hard to go on. But as disciples we have the harvest and a Savior to follow. We need to focus on Him and His work and leave the rest to Him.

V. 22 says it all. This is the verse that Peter used for 1 Peter 5:7, and that's probably where Psalms, the singing songbook, got the song, "I Cast All My Cares Upon You." If you know that song, I'll bet you wondered where it originated.

### **Proverbs 11:7**

Just a couple things to say here.

First, the hope of the person without God doesn't take into consideration that our 70 years on earth are like walking into the entry of a building. This is not all of reality. He can't see beyond this little place called earth, and he has no hope, beyond what he can buy and enjoy. Our hope is in the Lord and our treasure is in heaven. The question for us as disciples is, "Are we willing to forgo heaven on earth for the sake of the Lord and the harvest and heaven?" That is where we can chill.

Second, the word "wealth" can also be translated "strength." I think the NIV has the best translation, *When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes; all he expected from his power comes to nothing.*

This verse has good parallelism and it is true. Men hope their power and accomplishments will somehow translate into getting position or blessing in heaven. Alexander Dumas (The Count of Monte Cristo) said that if he got to heaven and found that he was out of step, he would just tell them a little story and perhaps it would open doors for him in heaven as it did for him on earth. Harry Houdini said he would find a way out of the afterlife, just like he found ways out of things here on earth. We haven't seen Harry since he died, and I doubt Alexander is telling anyone stories where he is.

## **MARCH 13**

### **Numbers 19-20**

Laura and I are looking forward to March 17, when we will celebrate making it to St. Pat's day in The One Year Bible. Actually today is another milestone in our reading. Today we begin Luke.

#### Numbers 19

So what is this chapter doing here? This law and recipe was for the cleansing of people who had touched dead things or were in the tent of a dead person. Why is God doing this now? It is because the camp of Israel is a camp of death. They just lost over 14,000 people in a day, and there will be hundreds of funerals every day until they enter the land. People will be dying in their tents every day. Everyone will be handling dead people. Cleansing from sin required the death of something. Sin brings death, and so sin is to be feared and avoided. The best way to avoid sin was for them not to focus on sin, but to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, minds, souls and strength.

There are all sorts of symbolic things going on here. You can have fun finding them, too.

Vs. 1-10 This is the recipe. Notice that the red heifer, by its color, symbolized blood.

V. 3 Notice too that these instructions were to be carried out by Eleazar, Aaron's son. That is a hint as to what is coming. The fact that the animal was killed and burned outside the camp must have symbolized sin and distance from God. Jesus, Himself, died outside the camp, outside of Jerusalem and the temple.

Then the ashes were gathered and kept in a special clean place outside of the camp. The ashes were mixed with water to make "water for impurity" for cleansing from the uncleanness of death.

V. 10 Notice that this was to be a perpetual ordinance to be obeyed and followed "forever" (v. 21). It might be that later, when Israel was in the land and the priests and Levites lived among the people, as the priest returned from duty at the tabernacle or temple, they brought this cleansing water back with them.

Vs. 11-13 The people would be made clean by the ashes of an animal that was killed for their sin and cleansing. Now, they would have to come to the tabernacle and allow the priest to sprinkle them with this water. Later, in the land, the local priests and Levites would have to do this.

Vs. 14-19 These verses apply to specific situations. The hyssop was also used to apply the blood to the doorposts on Passover.

It is interesting that Jesus told the Pharisees in Luke 11:44, *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.* The idea is that people became unclean by coming in contact with the teaching of the Pharisees, whereas the Pharisees washed when they came in from the markets because they thought the people were unclean.

Vs. 20-22 This is a warning to the people to make sure they went through this cleansing ceremony. It is interesting that the priest who did the cleansing also became unclean. What a powerful way for God to show the people that sin brought separation and death. What a way for them to be prepared for being cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

## Numbers 20

Between chapters 15 and 20, thirty-eight years pass. Here's how you know this. In chapter 20 Miriam and Aaron die. The events of the chapter appear to be in close order and make sense together. Miriam dies in the first month but we don't find out when Aaron dies until Numbers 33:38. Aaron dies in the fifth month of the 40th year after leaving Egypt. In Num 33:36 it mentions the wilderness of Zin, just before Aaron's death. That's where Miriam dies.

What this means is that Israel is on the brink, again, of entering the land.

V. 1 Notice that Miriam's death is only mentioned in passing. This is one of those places where it is not only good to observe the event, but to consider what it may have meant to Moses and Aaron. Miriam was the sister who watched over Moses in the basket in the water and waited until the princess found him. Without getting overly sentimental, Miriam's death may have had a lot of meaning for Moses and Aaron. It may also have made them vulnerable.

Vs. 2-13 This is a very tragic event. The people complained of not having water and went after Moses. He and Aaron did the right thing; they went and *fell on their faces* before the Lord. God told them what to do, and then in anger, Moses reacted to the people and rather than speaking to the rock as he was told, got dramatic and showed his stuff and struck the rock twice, as if he was the one giving them water. God judged Moses and Aaron for this.

Now, I wonder if v. 1 had anything to do with Moses and Aaron being completely mad at the people. If you're asking me, I think it had a huge impact.

I'm sure God didn't want Moses to take the people into the land. But he used Moses' anger and disobedience to show the people that He doesn't play favorites. To whom much is given, much is required. All in all, Moses and Aaron have clean records, and Moses ranks as one of the greatest men who ever walked the earth, but they were still men - and the best thing to do at any time is to honor God.

Vs. 14-21 God wouldn't let Israel fight against the Edomites anyway, because they were, as a nation, related to Abraham. But this does show something that will become more obvious. All nations were aware of this big, bulky mass of people in the wilderness. Forty years is a long time. By this time, all the caravans knew them. And, of course, the word had gotten out regarding the promise of God to Abraham concerning Canaan. When the spies enter Jericho, they will be told by Rahab what the nations knew and what they were thinking. For now, the nations felt confident and aggressive toward this big, lumbering, defenseless, nomadic nation.

Vs. 22-29 Again, this was an object lesson to the people. As great as Aaron was, he was not above obedience to God. Notice in v. 24, the prominent role his rebellion played at his death. Apparently this happened in the sight of the people. They saw the garments of a high priest taken off of Aaron and put on Eleazar. The people who mourned would also know they pushed Moses and Aaron into judgment.

As disciples, our strength is not in past accomplishments or in how people view us. Our strength is in our personal worship of loving, honoring and following Christ now. The further we follow Christ in the harvest, the more we realize how much we owe everything to Him, including "our" successes. To model this kind of humility is like gold, because "every disciple, when he is fully taught will be like his teacher." This doesn't just mean that we will be good models for those we disciple, but that we as disciples are becoming more and more like Him.

### **Luke 1:1-25**

I don't think we're supposed to have a "favorite" Gospel or writer, but I've got to admit I really like Luke. It is going to be hard for me to write notes to spark interest, rather than writing sermons. I'll give it my best shot to give you only what you need.

Luke, a Gentile, was from Troas, a port city in western Turkey, across from Greece. In fact, Luke is the only Gentile writer in the Bible. His Gospel and Acts make up about 28% of the Greek NT. Not bad for a Gentile. He might have been a ship's physician. No one knows when Luke came to Christ. He met Paul in Troas and traveled with him (the "we" chapters of Acts) from time to time. Even here, there are gaps. Luke appears to have been with Paul during the two years he was imprisoned in Caesarea. It looks like Luke could have written his Gospel either during the 7-8 year gap between Acts 16 and Acts 20, or during Paul's time in Caesarea. It would have taken Luke lots of time to have contacted eyewitnesses and done interviews. Unlike the other Gospel writers who knew Jesus or were related to Him, Luke would had to have done original research. Caesarea would have been a good base of operations for that. It was a transportation hub and a place where many Christians were and had to pass through. Also, it wasn't far from Jerusalem.

There are a couple things that make Luke's writing unique that stand out to me. They could be the influence of Paul, or simply the influence of being a follower of Jesus. First, more than any other writer, Luke mentions Jesus praying; in fact, he shows Jesus praying during events that other writers mention, but not the fact that He was praying. Also, Luke frequently mentions the Holy Spirit leading Jesus and others. Finally, Luke seems to be the most chronological account of Jesus' life.

Your observations are important for you to get the "taste" of discovery. I'll just write some things that stand out to me.

V. 1-7 Apparently lots of people were writing "narratives." We know about Matthew, Mark and John. I wouldn't consider those as "many." Apparently there were more, and there was some confusion regarding the truth of what happened.

V. 4 The RSV says, *that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.* You get the idea that there were not only many reports, but some of them were not accurate. Apparently Theophilus was already a believer.

Vs. 8-17 I have a sermon on this called, "It happened at a prayer meeting." It is no accident that this is where Luke begins. Not only was it the hour of prayer, but Gabriel was standing next to the altar of incense, the incense representing the prayers constantly going up to God in the Holy Place.

Notice also that Gabriel said he had come to answer Zechariah's prayer, but we know he was also there in answer to a lot of other prayers, going back to Adam and Eve.

Notice that John will be a Nazirite from birth, but will also be filled with the Spirit from the womb.

Vs. 18-20 I think it is interesting that Gabriel was hard on Zechariah. Zechariah, as a priest, in spite of the miracle promised here, should have believed. Not only was there biblical precedent for the fulfillment of this promise (old people having babies), but there was a very special angel

standing before him. There was only one angel ever named in the OT, who was sent from God to speak to a man; and it was Gabriel who was sent to Daniel to reveal God's destiny of the nation of Israel. In typical OT fashion, God is going to use Zechariah and his lack of faith as an object lesson and symbol as part of the wonder of this event.

It is impossible for us to imagine how stunned Zechariah was, especially hearing that the prayer he and Elizabeth had prayed so long, and then given up on, would be answered. Not to mention that it is coupled together with the fulfillment of all the law and prophets.

Adding to his wonder in seeing Gabriel standing in the Holy Place next to the altar of incense is that these were the first words that God had spoken since He spoke to Malachi. The 400 silent years ended and His first words came to Zechariah announcing the forerunner of the Lord.

Vs. 21-23 Apparently you didn't get time off for seeing a vision and being made (deaf? and) unable to speak. Many surprises were in store for Elizabeth when Zechariah returned home.

Vs. 24-25 This shows that Elizabeth had faced reproach without any vindication. They may have both been righteous before God, but in the eyes of men she was barren and under God's punishment. She had lived in this shame, had suffered in it, had wept through it; and she had finally accepted it. All of that, as unfair as it was, was designed by God to intensify the personal and public wonder of what was happening now. She hid herself for five months, but now she couldn't hide anymore. The word was getting out and creating news all over the place. In fact, the news might have just reached a poor teenage girl in an obscure village in Galilee. If it hadn't yet, it will tomorrow via special delivery.

## **Psalm 56**

The note in the ESV says, "when the Philistines seized him in Gath." That is misleading. Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15. David went to Gath to hide from Saul, and once there, he was seized with fear of the Philistines and didn't know where to run. Finally, he calmed down and regained his composure before the Lord. It was a terrifying time in David's life and he almost lost his way.

Vs. 1-2 David was in the early days of running from King Saul. Lies were being circulated, so David wouldn't find any help among the people of Israel.

Vs. 3-4 This will be what ultimately saves David. He trusts in God and in His Word.

Vs. 5-7 Again, David would suffer not only from the hardship of running, but his name and reputation were being destroyed among the people.

Vs. 8-11 This is an interesting twist on God knowing the number of our hairs. David knew God even counted tears. David's praise and love for God and His Word made him a great man and helped him survive very hard and dangerous times.

Vs. 12-13 David knew he was in debt to God. The fulfillment of his gratitude was seen in rendering thanks and testimony to God.

V. 13 is interesting, because David would be saved many times. They were little deliverances for which he would praise God and write a psalm, but it would still be 10-15 years before God would bring David peace.

God does this with us too. He doesn't always remove our challenges, but He gives us little deliverances to encourage us and to strengthen our faith to keep going and to praise Him in the harvest.

## **Proverbs 11:8**

The meaning is that there is this hole in the road. One man avoids it, but the other falls into it. The difference in the two men is their willingness to be led by God. Sometimes our

understanding of "righteousness" gets us into trouble. There is no righteousness on our part that is not ours through God's help, mercy and grace. It is the Word and Spirit that move us to understand the love and sacrifice of Christ. To be proud and "self righteous" is of the enemy and has nothing to do with Christ. Disciples need to watch themselves here on earth and stay in the harvest. Working with Christ, trying to reach lost people is a good way to remember that, without His grace, we would never have known Him. You learn to appreciate the miracle of your own salvation by working with those who have yet to understand.

## **MARCH 14**

### **Numbers 21:1-22:20**

Only in The One Year Bible would you find some of the events today so close to St. Patrick's Day.

On p. 253 of the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, there is a map of a possible route for the Exodus. It might be good to look at this since it gives you an idea of where the Lord took the people. If you look at that map, the dashed lines with arrows are where they went, but the dotted line is the King's Highway. The adventure today begins at Kadesh. Israel was at Kadesh 39 years earlier. After the first fiasco at Kadesh-barnea, they went back south to the dessert of Paran and the gulf of Aqaba. Now God has led Israel back to Kadesh where it all took place, the scene of the crime, to begin again.

I find it interesting that God works with us like He did with Israel. When we lose our minds because of anger, disobedience or immaturity, and then when we find our minds and repent, He often brings us back to the scene of the crime. Hopefully then, we are ready to obey and follow.

### Numbers 21

Vs. 1-3 Two big things happen here. First, Israel hasn't wanted a fight, but Arad takes the fight to them, possibly interpreting their response to Edom as being weak. Remember, Israel was camped at Ezion Geber and wanted to go up the King's Highway through Edom, but Edom refused and God wouldn't let them fight Edom. Therefore, God took them north again to Kadesh. Ironically, in order for Israel to recapture those who were taken and to destroy Hormah, Israel's army had to go into southern Canaan. This is the very territory that the spies walked through. Israel's defeat of Arad put them on the front page of everyone's newspaper, and armies were beginning to sharpen their swords.

Second, Israel cried out to God because of the attack and God fulfills their request. I think this was the first time they sought God to ask for something without complaining. They made a vow to destroy this city and take nothing for themselves. Interesting that it took an attack from an enemy to make the people come to God with such intensity. I wonder if God allows stuff like this to happen to us too, to build the intensity in us to earnestly follow Him.

Vs. 4-9 My sense here is that God allowed hard times to develop the people's faith, but also to get the discontented to show themselves and thin them out of the people. Even though Israel is only months from entering the land, there are still people of the past generation who need to die; and there are, amongst the younger people, those with bitter hearts. In a sense, God is giving the new generation a lesson by allowing that older generation to show their rebellion and to be punished.

V. 7 This is another "first." The people were repentant and came to Moses asking for help.

If you want some good exercise, try to figure out how and why Jesus used this story in John 3 in His talk with Nick. The element that makes this situation understandable, in contrast to Aaron running among the people with his censer, is that faith saved the people. They had the info (to look at the serpent), they believed (trusted) it was true, and they looked. On an unseen spiritual

level, when they exercised faith, God Himself saw their faith and their hearts and cured them. The unseen spiritual transaction is what Jesus was talking about with Nick and Nick couldn't grasp it.

This snake was later used in Israel for idolatry, until Hezekiah destroyed it in 2 Kings 18:4. Paul refers to this event as putting the Lord to the test in 1 Corinthians 10.

By the way, what was St. Patrick's claim to fame? He drove the snakes out of Ireland. (And they all immigrated to the USA.)

Vs. 10-20 We've lost this *Book of the Wars*, but it is mentioned here because this begins the conquest of the land. Even though Israel is still on the east side of the Jordan and not in the land, the next battles will give them possession of land that will become part of Israel.

Vs. 16-18 This is another first for Israel. This generation is actually singing and praising the Lord for water. We'll notice a lot of changes after one notable final malfunction.

V. 20 If you are looking at a map, Mt. Pisgah is actually a part of Mt. Nebo.

V. 21-32 They tried not to fight with Sihon, who, by the way, stole this land from the Moabites. Sihon hurt himself in fighting, because Israel only wanted to pass through. They only wanted the land to the west of the Jordan.

Vs. 27-30 In this song sung by the Amorites in celebration of defeating the Moabites, notice that the Moabites were dispossessed of this land partially due to their worship of Chemosh or Moloch. It was the other side of Baal worship where the unwanted children were thrown, in sacrifice, into the blazing mouth of this god's altar.

Vs. 31-32 Under God's guidance Moses took the rest of Sihon's land and possession. They now belonged to Israel.

Vs. 33-35 Then, King Og had to try his hand at fighting Israel and was also defeated. Not much is said about Og here, but later Moses will refer to him in his final address to the people in Deuteronomy. On the one hand, you might see this trouble as just bad, discouraging things happening to Israel. They are not even in the land yet and people are picking fights with them. But how often does God use "bad" things for good? First, remember that the 10 spies told the people to be afraid of the giants. Guess what? Og was a giant. That would be a good shot of confidence. I'll bet he was easy to pick off, because you know - big guys make big targets. Second, now Israel almost owns all of the land east of the Jordan River. Third, notice that in spite of punishing Moses by not letting him lead Israel into the land, God is honoring Moses. God has allowed Moses to capture the land, the inheritance of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. That's very gracious that God allowed this.

Numbers 22:1-20

Vs. 1-4 This next war will involve the Moabites and the Midianites, but only because of their aggression toward Israel. Both of these people are related to Israel, so God wouldn't have allowed Israel to fight them. Also, both of these nations were on the east side of the Jordan, so they were not in the Promised Land, and therefore were not in danger.

Vs. 4-6 Now, the world back then was far more "spiritual" than our world today. What I mean is that people still understood that the world was ruled by spiritual forces. Rationalism hadn't blinded men to the spiritual. Now, obviously, the spiritual forces were not ones they understood. But here Balak sought a spiritual solution to get rid of Israel, because he perceived that a strictly military approach wouldn't work.

Vs. 7-14 Balaam is a very interesting guy. His name will become a bad word in the Bible. He will become representative of a kind of evil person who understands God and can use that

understanding to bring destruction on others. He will represent someone who looks like he knows God, but will betray and harm believers. His motivation, as we'll see, is for his own gain.

Balaam lived on the Euphrates, probably near Mari on the Syria/Iraq border, not exactly an easy place to get to. Balaam had been used of God, and God had apparently spoken to him before. Balaam was an active witness of God in the area where he lived. The word around was that if Balaam blessed anything, it was blessed; and if he cursed it, it was cursed.

Notice how naturally God communicated with Balaam and vice versa.

Vs. 12-13 Notice that Balaam doesn't tell them what God told him. He just says that he can't go with them. He doesn't mention that God will only bless His people.

Vs. 15-20 It looks to me that since Balaam didn't tell the entire story, Balak was encouraged to send a bigger offer.

V. 18 Notice the words, *the Lord my God*.

V. 20 This looks like all is well. God gives Balaam the OK, but God sees what is growing in Balaam's heart. Tomorrow we'll see it too.

Some people think that God was not giving all people on the planet back then a chance to be saved. Here we find that, unknown to us; God was working through this obscure guy. Notice though that God revealed Himself as Yahweh, not some other religion. Unknown to us, God had His witnesses, and people were hearing the message.

### **Luke 1:26-56**

In recording these words to both Zechariah and to Mary, the Spirit is showing us the exact moment when God broke His 400-year silence. The final words of Malachi speak of the forerunner of the Lord and then warn the people to repent. The first words from God continue where He left off. The forerunner was announced, and now comes the announcement of the Savior.

V. 26 The sixth month is Elizabeth's sixth month. Elizabeth had been out of hiding now for a month.

Vs. 28-33 In the announcement, notice the reference to David and the fulfillment of the promise to Adam, Abraham and all sorts of OT prophecies.

Vs. 34-35 Why do you think Gabriel didn't "whammy" Mary, like he did Zechariah, when she asked her question? I think Zechariah should have known better and was speaking out of doubt. I think Mary believed but just wondered how it would happen. You don't have a Messiah every day.

Notice that the Holy Spirit has been mentioned in both announcements.

Vs. 36-37 It may be here that Gabriel is telling Mary something of which she already has heard a rumor.

V. 38 This is great faith on Mary's part.

Vs. 39-45 Notice that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions the work of the Spirit often.

V. 44 Luther, even after he was saved, used this text to prove that a baby can believe and therefore should be baptized for salvation. The text says the baby leaped, but Elizabeth says it leaped for joy. She certainly felt a Spirit-induced joy when she heard Mary's voice. I think Elizabeth had the joy and the Spirit just put his finger in there and tickled John. Even if the baby had "joy," it was induced by the Spirit and it wasn't faith in Christ.

V. 45 I wonder if she said this in contrast to her silent husband's questioning of Gabriel.

Vs. 46-55 What do you get out of Mary's praise of God? When you read this you get a feel for how much she knew about God and His promises. You also see that she understood the privilege of what this would mean for her too. Even though the reality of this might become foggy in the years ahead, with the Spirit's help I think she really understood she was about to have a Savior.

V. 56 Notice that Mary was there for about three months. She probably left right after the birth of John. When Mary returned to Nazareth she would have been three months pregnant and showing.

I have to laugh here. As disciples we know it is an incredible privilege to be saved and carry the message of Christ. Yet, we still face opposition even though we bring the message of life into the harvest. But we have to do it because we know Jesus' love, and it is our work for Him to make disciples.

So here is Mary, probably 15 or 16 years old, returning home with this amazing honor and privilege of carrying the Savior, literally, within her. I'm willing to bet that she faced some incredibly hard times and some severe misunderstandings carrying the Word of Life back into her hometown. I guess it is just part of being a disciple.

### **Psalm 57**

Even knowing Christ is risen, having the Spirit and having an incredible mission, we have to learn to hang on. So the Lord needs to lead us to these special places where "hanging on" is the best we can do. It's in stormy times when you get pushed to the edge of your faith, when you learn to look to the Lord and strengthen yourself in Him.

Vs. 1-3 David was hiding in a cave, gathering family, gathering outcasts and those in debt and those bitter of heart to become his little army. As he looked out of that cave he must have seen a storm pass over.

V. 2 I think David was remembering the promise God made to him when Samuel anointed him, as a young teen, to be king of Israel. I'll bet that seemed like a long time ago.

Vs. 4-6 Isn't the contrast of these verses amazing? Verse 5 looks like the calm in the storm.

Vs. 7-11 Where is that strengthening of soul taking place as David turns to the only One who can sustain him? It sort of reminds me of what Paul says about the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:20-21, *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

Vs. 9-11 are like a victory song. It isn't a victory over men, but rather over the damage of life on this fallen planet. There will always be threats and danger, but these verses show that a person can find safety abiding in the God of their salvation.

Sometimes it's OK not to be a hero, but just to survive the storm. Something happens in the "hanging on" that can't happen in any other place.

### **Proverbs 11:9-11**

Notice that this grouping begins and ends with the mouth of the godless/wicked man.

The knowledge of the righteous is not his intelligence, but that knowledge of God that controls his heart and actions. Looking at the psalm above, it is this knowledge of God that made David's heart steadfast in the middle of the storm he was living through.

## MARCH 15

### Numbers 22:21-23:30

#### Numbers 22:21-41

Vs. 21-30 This section has given rise to lots of jokes because of the talking donkey. On the other hand, Balaam, from this point on, becomes infamous in the Bible. He's a bad guy. The images he brings up are of a false believer, someone who has infiltrated the company of faith. He actually does "believing" stuff, prays out loud, and is someone whom God actually speaks to and uses. But, here's the thing, it affects the people of God to be useless for God, or it leads them to bring God's judgment on themselves. We'll read what Peter says about Balaam, but Paul talked about people like this who infiltrated churches and actually had a following in the church. Gain and position was always the motivation of these people. He told Timothy these errant teachers made their way into households by capturing people easily swayed; they thought "godliness" was a means to gain. To the Philippians Paul warned them of brothers whose god was their belly. And in a very strong warning at the end of Romans, Paul said that people like this "do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites."

To get a better idea before you read about Balaam, read 2 Peter 2, Revelation 2:14 and Numbers 31:8 and 16. I'd recommend this because it gives insight into what is happening with Balaam and the events immediately following his return to Mari.

V. 22 Here is a case in point where knowing what is going on with Balaam helps. You would eventually figure all of this out by reading your one-year Bible every year. God is mad at Balaam *because he went*, but God told him to go. The issue is what is brewing in Balaam's heart. He's looking for a loophole, and God knows it.

V. 30 I suppose one application here is that if an animal you own ever begins talking and wins the argument, you are in trouble.

Vs. 31-35 Verse 32 expresses what God has seen. Balaam is going with the intent of finding a way to get rich. He wants to find a way to be paid. Notice that the angel's warning to Balaam in v. 35 is only to speak the word *He* tells him. Balaam will obey until he is off the clock and on his way home. Then he finds the loophole.

In observing, one question will be, "Who is *the angel of the Lord?*" What clues do you have in vs. 31-35 that this is actually God, the pre-incarnate Son of God? This also helps explain Numbers 23:4 & 16.

Vs. 36-41 Notice that Balaam tells Balak that he must speak the word that God puts into his mouth. This will be like a refrain, and knowing Balaam, you wonder if there was something sinister even in him saying this.

V. 40 The sacrifices are interesting, because, though pagan, they were similar to what God told Israel to do. Since the Fall it is probably built into the conscience of man that God must be appeased somehow. Also, God apparently told Adam how to sacrifice to cover his sin and come before Him. Abel must have had some instruction. This probably passed down through mankind.

V. 41 The place Balak took Balaam was for Baal worship. Not only were these "holy" places, but Balak was hoping to find a part of Israel that God didn't like and would curse.

#### Numbers 23

Vs. 1-6 Don't vs. 4-5 amaze you? It appears that God gave Balaam a prescribed way to come before Him. For Balaam it was probably more like a rite to get God to do something. I don't think Balaam really worshiped God. But notice, God not only speaks with Balaam, but it also appears He meets with him. If so, this would be the angel of the Lord.

Vs. 7-10 This is Balaam's first blessing of Israel.

Vs. 11-17 Balak was upset, but Balaam was holding to the rules, and Balak believed in the need of spiritual warfare against Israel so deeply that he begged Balaam to try again.

V. 14 Pisgah is also the ridge from which Moses would look over the Promised Land and take his last breath.

V. 21 This is interesting. Balak keeps taking Balaam to a different spot to find some part of the people that God is displeased with and will curse, but here it says that God doesn't find anything about them that displeases Him. God certainly has His own issues with the people, but for the sake of His promise to Abraham, they are beloved. He says this through Paul also, *As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.* (Romans 11:28)

That's the same with us. God may have an issue, for the moment, with our behavior; but in Christ, we are absolutely and completely loved and accepted at every moment.

V. 23 God says He will not only protect Israel spiritually; but their success, like in Egypt, will be seen as His work.

Vs. 24- 30 I guess three times is a "charm" when you're trying to curse someone. *Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor.* That word, *Peor*, will become a bad word among Israel, but not because Balaam curses them. In fact Balaam can only bless Israel. But this will be the place where Balak uses a little trick Balaam will give him, and Israel will bring God's judgment upon themselves. At the foot of this mountain, 24,000 people will die, not because of a curse, but because Balaam knew God well enough to know what the people would have to do to get God to judge them.

### **Luke 1:57-80**

V. 63 This gives you the idea that Zechariah was not only unable to speak, but that he was also deaf. I think that when the angel told him he would be silent, he meant that Zechariah would live in silence and be unable to speak. That's why they had to make signs to him; and that's why, when he writes *John*, they are amazed. He couldn't have heard that conversation.

Vs. 64-66 God used this entire situation. Now, with this amazing situation He had built (Elizabeth's barrenness all those years, Zechariah's deafness and dumbness, the unexpected "miracle" pregnancy), suddenly Zechariah's mouth is opened and tongue loosed. The people go out and spread the word, not extremely far, but far enough. The seeds are planted, and in 30 years John will come forth. So, what was the news that the neighbors pondered in their hearts and spread far and wide? It was what they recounted, not only the physical events of John's birth, but also what they heard in vs. 67-79.

Vs. 67-79 Notice that the focus is salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Who did Luke find who remembered that prophecy? If I had to guess, I would say Luke heard it from Mary, Jesus' mother, who was still there and heard it.

Notice how the promise to Abraham brings deliverance to Israel and salvation to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

V. 80 We have no clue where John grew up. He might or might not have been raised in a very separate Essene community. It says that he lived in a remote place, which might have been east of Hebron, toward the Dead Sea. He would still have gone to Jerusalem three times a year as all Jewish males were required, and he would have known his cousin Jesus, and maybe his cousins James and John, who later became his disciples and then Jesus' disciples.

I know this might seem like "Christmas in March," but it should still be inspiring for us to hear how God patiently worked to bring salvation to the world. As disciples in the harvest, we have received this salvation. We are the fruit of God's love and patient working. We are the fruit *of the travail of His (Jesus') soul*, (Isa. 53:11, KJV) and Jesus is pleased at His work. What an incredible message to take into the harvest as we follow Him, making disciples, who make disciples.

### **Psalm 58**

We're not that "into" judgment, so this psalm, and its very graphic pictures, might leave us cold. Verse 11 is the point of this. There is a reward for being close to God on this planet and God does, and will, judge mankind. This morning I was reading some of the parables of Jesus regarding the Kingdom, and along with the images we like, there is also the warning of the close of the age when the angels will come out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire where men will weep and gnash their teeth.

We work in the harvest now, while there is still time for people to respond to God. *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* (John 5:24)

It's a good exercise to put things into sections to understand the flow of what the psalmist is saying.

Vs. 1-2 David is addressing those individuals who are making themselves judges over him and the people, spreading lies and mistreating the people. David is running from these individuals who are working for King Saul.

Vs. 3-5 David is declaring what they are like.

Vs. 6-9 David is asking God to judge them. If you read 1 Samuel 22, you'll see that these people deserved to have their teeth broken out.

Vs. 10-11 This is the hope of those who are oppressed for their faith and trust in God. I was reading today of Jesus saying that the day of the Son of Man would bring judgment on the earth. When you see Jesus sitting on the throne in Revelation and opening the seals, you understand that this will be a day of rejoicing for those who love God.

### **Proverbs 11:12-13**

This is a good word for anyone trying to reach his neighbors or the people close to him. The closer you get, the more you learn. Knowing the love of God, and the grace we have been shown, gives us the spiritual wisdom to be silent, patient and forbearing, so we can build trust and keep showing them the love of Christ.

### **MARCH 16**

I know I've said a lot (too much?) about St. Pat's Day, but the reason for this is to have a motivational point to look forward to. Use things like dates and events to help motivate yourself to do something, lose a pound or keep up with reading The One Year Bible. Set your own goals; find dates that are meaningful to you and not so far off and celebrate when you get there. Celebrate when you finish any and every book of the Bible. It is no small thing to be reading through the Word of God. It is the most important thing any person could ever do, and very few people, even Christians, will ever do it. But the real goal in this is to sit with the Lord, to hear Him and learn to understand Him.

## Numbers 24-25

One of the little evidences of the truth of God's Word is that if it were simply the national literature of Israel, they would never have included these stories. National literature doesn't air a people's darkest details to this degree. If, on the other hand, the Bible is the record of God dealing with man to bring him redemption, this all makes sense. Israel is given the distinction of becoming a picture of mankind, of every man and woman. They will later be honored for this; but until then, we see, through them, how we would all respond to God. We who know Him are only different, because we were redeemed out of death by the blood of Christ and have been given the Spirit to break the power of sin. Still, even with the Lord and the Spirit, we struggle. Without them, we'd be toast, like Israel.

### Numbers 24

Vs. 1-2 It seems that Balaam's intent was to look at Israel to find signs that would lead him to curse them. When he realized now that God would only bless them and understood God's love for Israel, apparently, his heart opened and the Spirit came upon him. This doesn't mean Balaam was a believer or following God any more than when this happened to King Saul, Caiaphas, or the donkey.

Vs. 3-9 From Balaam's vantage, high above the plain, the camp of Israel must have looked impressive. These seem to be the words of God. Notice in them the affection of God for Israel. Notice too in v. 9 that this is part of the blessing spoken to Abraham. Although the people were under the covenant with Moses, even above that was God's promise to Abraham for the blessing of all nations, and above that was the promise to Adam and Eve that there would be a redeemer.

Somewhere, too, we should remember that Israel had been camped out and living in the desert for 40 years at this point. This means they were a well-known people group and some of their history might have been known.

Vs. 10-11 Balak finally loses it and tries to rub it in that God has kept Balaam from getting rich. At this point Balaam still looks like a nice guy, but he hasn't given up on cashing in. He still has an ace to play.

Vs. 12-24 At v. 14, Balaam gives an overview of what will eventually happen in the future. The star and scepter of v. 17 could be David, in the nearer future, but eventually this will be Jesus at His second advent. The ships of Kittim are often thought to be from Rome and are mentioned again in Daniel, almost certainly meaning the growing Roman Empire.

V. 25 Balaam went home and the job was done. He passes out of the narrative, but you'll be surprised where he turns up.

### Numbers 25

Vs. 1-5 To some part of the camp, the locals came and said, "Hey, let's get to know each other. Let's have a grill party!" Finally, something other than manna. During the meal it was apparent that it was a feast to another god, and not just any god. It was Baal, the god that, among other things, brought fertility to people and to the fields. When you bowed down to Baal it was sexual. They used male and female cult prostitutes. To "yoke" themselves was to engage sexually in Baal worship. Apparently the men were easy and willing targets.

Vs. 4-5 show the extreme measures that Moses took. At first this looks simply like punishing the guilty who participated in this religious orgy. You notice that there were prominent men involved. But actually these measures by Moses were meant to stop the growing plague of death that began sweeping through the camp. Balaam couldn't curse the people, but these Midianites found a way to entice the people to bring themselves under God's wrath. It was working.

Vs. 6-15 Even though they had killed some of the leaders involved in this worship, who were consequently responsible for the plague that was sweeping the camp, the plague went on; and Moses, the priests and the elders were stunned and didn't know what to do. They were gathered at the entrance of the *tent of meeting*, but they were helpless. Then they all see a guy take a woman of Midian into his tent. They weren't going to have coffee together. Everyone sees this bold defiance, but no one moves. Suddenly, Phinehas sees the connection between the growing cry of death in the camp and this man and woman. He grabs a spear and sprints through the camp to this tent, and in one stroke he impales them both into the floor of the tent.

The plague instantly stopped. In those hours of sin and confusion, 23,000 died (Paul says 23,000 fell in a single day), and in the next days, another thousand died. Somehow there were scars or some sort of visible disease that was connected to this that Phinehas will refer to at the end of the book of Joshua.

Vs. 10-13 God makes a perpetual covenant with Phinehas. Here is the deal. Phinehas saw the connection between the sin and the death it was bringing, and he took action that brought peace. Therefore, it is a *covenant of peace*. The ministry of the priest was to bring peace between the people and God. I like what God says, *he was jealous with my jealousy*.

Vs. 16-18 God promises a fight, though it doesn't happen until chapter 31. If you want to look over chapter 31, you'll find Balaam's name at least twice. Notice here, the mention of *wiles* and *beguiled* in v. 18. There was careful, intentional planning that went on here. In chapter 31 we'll see that this plan came from Balaam.

Back to Phinehas. I really like this guy. As disciples, we do this in a similar way. We are to be passionate with Christ's passion, living as He lived, willing to die as He died, to bring the message of salvation to lost people. King Josiah had this passion for his people who were about to be taken into exile. *Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.* (2 Kings 22:19)

God has promised to bless our work in the harvest, but we need to be passionate with His passion and compassion. Jesus is our Lord and He is our model. We are His disciples to be like Him and to follow Him.

### **Luke 2:1-35**

One thing not to lose sight of is that in the words of both Mary and Zechariah, the promise to Abraham is spoken of. This is not an "Israel" thing going on, although for purposes of heralding the message, Israel was chosen. This is world redemption going on, beginning with Adam and Eve. Abraham would have had firsthand knowledge of the promise since he probably knew Noah or Shem and Noah's father knew Adam. When I was working on a freight dock, this guy asked me why God was a Jew. The answer is simple. God chose a man, not a nation or ethnic group. Today, Abraham would have been an Iraqi. God made a nation to herald the truth. They failed once, but they'll get it right next time. In the meantime, we're on.

Vs. 1-7 No one pinpoints dates like Luke does. This would have had a lot of meaning to Theophilus and the other Gentiles who read this. Luke's detail here and in Acts adds a ton of credibility to what he is writing.

V. 4 It is interesting to think that a Roman king would have such a harebrained idea to make everyone go to the city that their ancestors came from. But he did and God used it. Sometimes it's good just to obey and trust that God is working in the confusion.

V. 5 Luke identifies Mary as Joseph's betrothed, although Matthew says wife. They had not consummated the relationship, so though they were legally married, the relationship hadn't been "formally" begun. Luke may have been coming from a more Gentile perspective. He would have gotten all this information from Mary.

During this time of registering, the city would have been full. We'll see in a few verses that Joe and Mary were not alone, and although they were in the stable, it may have been that the innkeepers were taking care of all of their guests, including their guests, and the baby, in the stable.

Vs. 8-14 There is much debate about the time of Jesus' birth. We really don't know, but you can't use the argument that in winter they didn't have flocks around Bethlehem and Jerusalem. We know from the OT that there were morning and evening sacrifices every day and there were plenty of sacrifices in between. They would have kept large flocks around Jerusalem all year round. Bethlehem was only about 7.5 miles from Jerusalem and it was a popular place to keep flocks.

Vs. 15-20 It is interesting that Mary usually gets first billing. Matthew says more about Joseph being spoken to in dreams. Probably because Mary was still alive at the time of this writing and known in the church, she is given prominence. And besides, she was Jesus' mum.

V. 18 Notice that there were others present. We often picture the stable as being a lonely dark place, but I think this stable was being used for many guests. I doubt that there was a little kid with a drum.

Notice that Mary kept rolling these things through her mind and heart. That worked out good for Luke. And the shepherds went back rejoicing.

Vs. 22-24 We have read about these laws in the OT. Cool, huh? Notice that Joseph and Mary offer the sacrifice for poor people, but not the extremely poor. They hadn't yet been visited by the wise men, who brought gifts that made the poor couple fairly well-to-do and financed their escape and stay in Egypt.

Vs. 25-35 Simeon is a great guy. Notice the references to the Spirit. Notice also the mention of salvation to the Gentiles. This would have been an important verse in the early church. Luke, again, would have gotten this from Mary.

Notice that Jesus will be *a sign that is opposed....so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed*. A person's response to Jesus reveals their hearts. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*

As disciples we have to be willing to get the Word out there to give people the chance to respond. How they respond is not up to us. What we don't want is to be afraid of identifying with our Lord and having the sword pass through our own souls. I know my own fear, and Paul had to tell Timothy not to be afraid.

## **Psalm 59**

This is sort of funny. "Hey, guys, what melody should I use for this song?" "I don't know. Why don't we go with "Do Not Destroy"? I wonder if it had heavy percussion.

It is hard for us in the western world to really grasp having a powerful enemy. How do you get trained in focusing on the Lord, other than being so overwhelmed by oppression and threat that you learn to bend your mind and heart to the Lord. Look at v. 16. The flow of this psalm is very reminiscent of the flow of Psalm 119, David's masterpiece.

The Psalms are an easy place for you to train your mind to look for the changing of thoughts and seeing how the Spirit and the psalmist are laying out this plea for help and praise of God.

Vs. 1-5 David cries for help against these enemies and asks God to look at the situation and to judge. The "selah" isn't always there, but it does give you an idea here where the thought breaks.

Vs. 6-7 This is an "artsy" sort of refrain.

Vs. 8-10 This is David's confidence and trust in the Lord. My heart latches on to these references to God being our *fortress* and being met by *his steadfast love*.

Vs. 11-13 This is an interesting wrinkle in asking for God's judgment. David wanted God to judge them in such a way that the people would see that King Saul and his leaders were wrong. This is exactly what happened. As Saul chased David and rejected God, the nation went down the tubes. Saul's life was not happy and his legacy was horrible.

Vs. 14-15 This is the repeating of the refrain from above. It sounds better in German, but it would sound similar in English if it were written, "howling like the hounds."

Vs. 16-17 And again, David's confidence is in God, who hides him in His *fortress* and shows David His faithful, *steadfast love*.

### **Proverbs 11:14**

The Lord is telling us to stay connected to lots of *counselors* at all times, assuming the counselors love the Lord.

### **MARCH 17**

Happy St. Pat's Day! This is a good light reading for today.

### **Numbers 26:1-51**

One thing you might do for interest is to go back to Numbers, chapter 1, and find the size of each tribe then and write it in next to the population of the tribe here. You'll notice that a couple of tribes got bigger.

V. 14 This is a shocker. What happened to Simeon? This is just guess work, but look back at yesterday's reading about the guy that Phinehas killed. In Numbers 25:14 it says what tribe he belonged to. It might be that the Midianites made their friendly offer at the location where the tribe of Simeon was located. Israel was probably like a city with 12 areas, like Brooklyn, the Bronx, etc. It makes sense that the Midianites had to begin in one place, at one of these tribes. If the tribe of Simeon made up the majority of the 24,000 who fell, it would explain the decrease.

I have the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Zebulun, Ephraim and Naphtali in the minus category. What did you come up with?

Apparently, at this point, the generation of men who rebelled against the Lord at Kadesh-barnea was gone.

### **Luke 2:36-52**

Vs. 36-38 Anna is another person who was on the scene when Simeon was blessing Jesus. Notice that she, like Simeon, was very devout and looking for redemption. And, she had a prayer life.

Between vs. 38 and 39 the wise men come, Joseph & Co. go to Egypt, Herod kills the children, Herod dies, and Joseph & Co. return and go to Nazareth.

Vs. 39 and 40 summarize their return to Nazareth.

Vs. 41-52 Joseph and Mary always went to Jerusalem and they always took Jesus. Apparently it was at this Passover that Jesus became fully aware that He was the Son of God.

V. 46 Most likely the three days is the time Jesus was missing. Joe and Mary walked a day north, then they walked a day back and then sometime on the third day they found Him.

V. 49 Jesus is simply saying, "You should have checked here first." The stunning part of this is Jesus calling God His Father. I'm sure that in the daily routine of life during the past 10 years, the predictions of His birth and the things that happen seemed dim. This would have been a slight wake-up call. In some respects, I'll bet this was a slightly different Jesus who returned with them.

Vs. 51-52 How would Luke have known this if Mary hadn't told him?

## **Psalm 60**

It's interesting that yesterday Balaam prophesied that Edom would be subdued by Israel. Israel's first defeat of Edom happened because of the events this psalm laments. David would cry out to God and God would lead him to subdue the Edomites.

Vs. 1-3 God had promised Israel that if they followed Him they would never turn their backs on their enemies. As you can see in the introduction to the choirmaster, David was up north fighting against the forces from outside of Israel that were trying to take Israel. David was in his early days as the king of the entire nation. While he was in the north fighting, the Edomites came into Israel and wreaked havoc. This is why David is so upset. The only way this could happen in Israel is because Israel had sinned. David would work hard to reestablish the worship of God, but the nation had wandered for many years and there was a lot of rebuilding to do.

Vs. 4-5 David learned in all of his years of running that God was his refuge. Now David would have to begin leading his people in worship so that every man and woman would turn to God. This was their only hope.

Vs. 6-8 David is encouraging himself in God's sovereignty and also in God's Word. As we read yesterday, and as David knew, God had already spoken against Israel's enemies.

Vs. 9-12 And now David had to fight against Edom. David knew how to cry out to God and God answered.

## **Proverbs 11:15**

This says not to be bound by your word or by a contract with someone you don't know. Paul says it to all of us when he says in 2 Corinthians 6:14, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

Paul says it to Timothy, the pastor, in a slightly different way in 1 Timothy 5:22, *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.*

## **MARCH 18**

### **Numbers 26:52-28:15**

Everything we are reading is preparation for the new generation to enter the land. God is getting them ready. Some of these instructions are new and some are a restating of what had been given 38 years earlier. Although we may have a hard time reading some of this, for these people there was a growing excitement and energy. They had just won some battles and survived the trial at Baal-Peor. Now they were being counted and equipped to follow God into the land promised to their fathers.

## Numbers 26:52-65

Vs. 52-56 God is giving instructions how each tribe is to be given its land. Joshua and Eleazar will do this in the book of Joshua. The lots were probably the Urim and Thummim. It is possible that the initial decisions were made during this time before Moses died, and it was confirmed after the main military opposition in Canaan had been removed.

Vs. 57-62 This is the renumbering of the Levites. Notice that Moses' mother is a daughter of Levi. Too bad Levi died 400 years earlier. The way to understand this is that she was probably descended from him in some direct way. A couple of days ago in Luke 1:5, we read that Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron, meaning that she descended from the line of Aaron. Tribes could intermarry, but saying it like this means that the woman was a descendant through Levites of that tribe. We already noted that Aaron's wife was from Judah.

I don't see any indication that the tribe of Levi was included in God's punishment of the people for the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. Also, note that they gained 1000 people in the previous 38 years.

Vs. 63-65 This is confirming that none of the men who were part of the first census was alive for this census. Only Caleb and Joshua were alive from that generation. I think that Caleb, from Judah, and Joshua, from Joseph (Ephraim), both being godly leaders is somehow a fulfillment of Jacob's blessings on both Ephraim and Judah in Genesis 49.

## Numbers 27

Vs. 1-11 As the word was circulating through the camp, how the land would be divided and how the inheritance would be disbursed, these women came forward and God honored them in their request. This created a new law. Who says God isn't for women's rights? Actually, it also shows that the laws that God gave were to become the basis of the people coming to Him in specific situations where He had not given a clear word. The laws didn't give guidance for every possible contingency, but they were general enough to show the people what to do in normal circumstances. These women showed what would happen when godly people came to inquire when a general law didn't address a specific situation. This is no little event. We will hear about it at least two more times.

Vs. 12-23 God's words to Moses are absolute. We can invest this with all the human emotion we want to, but really, Moses needed a rest. I still cringe when I visualize Charlton Heston falling on his knees and saying, "You are a hard God." Moses definitely blew it, and God was using the situation as a lesson to all of us lesser men that if He didn't cut Moses any slack, we should be a little afraid to overstep the boundaries of our stupidity. I get that. And now, Moses was going into retirement. First, Moses would ease Joshua into his position as the new leader, and then later Moses would enter into heaven. Into heaven!! Sitting in a lounge chair, sipping something cool, watching the mountains or sea or universe, chilling, eating a Maria's Pizza from Milwaukee (the best in the universe if you eat it hot). I understand the human pathos of not achieving a goal, but really, I can't feel too sorry for Moses. And remember, God has already used Moses (Numbers 21, 31-32) to lead Israel in its initial battles and in obtaining the inheritance of 2.5 tribes.

Vs. 15-17 Moses asks God to appoint a leader. This plea was passionate. Notice that Moses asks that God appoint a shepherd for the people.

Vs. 18-23 The selection of Joshua was evident. Moses had been mentoring Joshua for 40 years. Again, this is interesting because of Jacob's blessing on Ephraim. As a young man, Joshua was visibly a man of faith. Now, as one of the oldest men in the community, and a hero of faith, God is elevating Joshua in the sight of Israel while Moses is still alive. What a great idea. Now Israel has a new leader who, still for a while, is being mentored by Moses. Also, just as God chose to use Moses when he was eighty years old, Joshua is very likely about eighty years young too. It is

interesting that God would use men this old, seasoned and mature, to lead 6-10 million people. That certainly doesn't fit our church growth thinking today. Apparently God looks for something different in choosing a disciple who will act as a shepherd.

Notice too, that God has also brought Eleazar to the forefront. I find it interesting in v. 21 that Eleazar and Joshua are to be a team. If Joshua has any questions of the Lord, he is to go to Eleazar who will use the Urim and Thummim to find out God's will. God is putting all the pieces into place.

#### Numbers 28:1-15

This chapter is an old instruction for a new generation. When the people walked into the land, their daily sacrifices, their seeking of forgiveness and renewal before God would be important. I would guess that is why God says this now. Notice also that with the restating of these sacrifices, the grain and wine offerings are also mentioned. The emphasis is not only on forgiveness, but on how God gives them every day "all things richly to enjoy."

I got something completely different out of this chapter. On March 16 I mentioned something about people who make a big deal of saying that the time of Jesus' birth might not have been in December. One of the "proofs" of this is that flocks shouldn't have been out around Bethlehem and Jerusalem in winter. Anyway, it's really not a big deal either way. But when I read this chapter, for the daily offering, the monthly offering and the offering on each Sabbath, I began adding. I came up with needing 90 lambs a month, plus, when people came to Jerusalem from a long distance, they would have bought a lamb locally to sacrifice. They always would have had flocks around Jerusalem, even in the winter.

As disciples in the harvest one of the things the Lord does with us is to simplify our needs and desires. The less we desire of anything else than Him, the more we have of Him, and in that simplicity, we realize more and more the wonder of what He gives us to enjoy.

#### Luke 3:1-22

Vs. 1-2 John the Baptist appears and Luke pinpoints the date.

Vs. 3-6 Notice that John's message had to do with preparation for the Messiah and focusing the people on their need for forgiveness. Notice too in Isaiah's prophecy, that *all flesh* would see the salvation of God. We are now a part of that.

Vs. 7-9 In Mark, this "rant" was because the Pharisees and Sadducees showed up for baptism. John was testing the sincerity of their hearts and also said this to the people. The people responded with open hearts. Even tax collectors and soldiers (Romans) wanted to know what to do to escape the wrath to come. The Pharisees and Sadducees probably immediately stopped listening, since they considered themselves righteous.

Vs. 10-14 Notice that everyone wanted to understand what they needed to do. The assumed answer might have been to perform some religious duty or sacrifice at the temple. Instead, God pointed them to loving God by loving their neighbor.

Vs. 15-16 John didn't have a self-serving bone in his body. He was a total servant and took no glory. John was not only unworthy to carry or untie Jesus' sandals, but his baptism didn't bring life or the cleansing of judgment. Jesus would baptize *with the Holy Spirit*. Think of that. When we trust Christ as our Savior, it is as if He is standing beside us. Instead of some "unseen" act, we are told that the Spirit comes as Jesus personally baptizes us. That is pretty cool. The baptism of fire is the sense of judging the world, casting fire upon the earth.

Vs. 17-18 I love the contrast of these two verses. John was authentic and passionate and truthful, and the people responded.

Vs. 19-20 are a summary of John's active ministry. John wasn't thrown into jail until after Jesus' temptation and after he overturned the tables in the temple at the next Passover. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary, John's ministry was less than a year and he was in jail about two years.

Vs. 21-22 This is the purpose that John came for, to baptize and give testimony to the Christ. Luke is the only writer who tells us that Jesus was praying after His baptism, and then the Spirit came upon Him. This is also where Luke eases us into the ministry of Jesus, beginning here with His baptism/anointing, followed by His genealogy and then His showdown with Satan.

### **Psalm 61**

I never noticed how often David talks in his psalms about dwelling with the Lord. For a man like David, who ran for his life and lived in caves and then among the Philistines, to be absolutely secure meant to live with the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 David did rock climbing (running from Saul) for about ten years. He knew how to climb and how to defend himself. But David was seeking a Rock higher than he could climb and a defense more secure than what he could provide for himself. He wanted to be safe on God's rock, in His refuge and under His wings. It takes being driven in fear to appreciate how much we need the Lord. At this point in his life, God had "simplified" David's heart through suffering.

Vs. 5-8 Whether David was the king now isn't known, but David had been anointed as king years earlier as a young teen. I'm sure David spoke of this when he prayed and made vows and held on to faith in God's faithfulness.

In so many of David's prayers, he expresses that what God wants from us is not sacrifice, but public praise for His love and salvation. That is what we are to be doing in the harvest.

As disciples reading Romans 8 you see Paul talking about our security as believers, but this security is in the love of Christ. The love of Christ, in the context of Romans 8, means a lot. In Christ, we have the Spirit; we are adopted, foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. There is nothing that can condemn us or separate us from Christ. There is nothing that can make God not love us, and because of Christ, death just becomes a dark little line on the sidewalk. You step over it and there's a lounge chair waiting. That gives us, as disciples, the confidence to go for it here and share our praise for God. We are already abiding in the Rock who is higher than we are.

### **Proverbs 11:16-17**

Great words.

### **MARCH 19**

To keep up reading The One Year Bible it is nice to have some days when we can reverently speed read something. Today in the NT will be one of these days, but only if you want to. The OT reading lends itself to some quick devout reading also.

### **Numbers 28:16-29:40**

At this point, it is either weeks or just a couple of months before Israel enters the land. I doubt that the address of Deuteronomy took less than a week to deliver. And at the end of Deuteronomy when Moses died, the people stayed in one place for 30 days and mourned for him. Still, every day there would have been a growing excitement that the cloud would lift and that God would lead them into Canaan. There are still some things to be put in order and God is focusing on their relationship to Him.

This is good for us to remember too. God's preparation in using us in the harvest has less to do with our abilities than with our heart. When I read John 15 I read about fruit, but that fruit is dependent on disciples being pruned and abiding in Christ. Lots of people do stuff without abiding in Christ. God wants the right kind of disciples, so He will have the kind of fruit that abides and makes disciples, who make disciples.

In our reading today there is a constant refrain. Yesterday God reminded Israel of the daily offerings. These would be daily, perpetual reminders of their need for forgiveness and God's gracious provision of all things for them. Today, as God reviews the holy days and feasts, He will remind them over and over and over not to forget the daily offerings. Even with the offerings of those special days, they were still to offer the lamb in the morning and in the evening.

Numbers 28:16-31

Vs. 16-25 These are the instructions for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In spite of all the offerings going on, the morning and evening offerings were still to be daily reminders of their need and God's care. This was one of three occasions where all males had to be present in Jerusalem. Notice that the last day of this feast was a Sabbath rest.

Vs. 26-31 This was the *Feast of Weeks*, meaning that it took place seven weeks after the Sabbath mentioned above. This was the Feast of the Firstfruits or Pentecost. This is the second of the three occasions when all males had to be present in Jerusalem. Notice v. 31. You get the idea that this is really a key emphasis.

Numbers 29

Vs. 1-6 This was like their New Year's feast. It signaled one of the most important events was about to take place, the Day of Atonement, followed by the Feast of the Tabernacles. The males didn't have to be in Jerusalem for this, but it was more an alert for the nation, and men, to get ready to head to Jerusalem.

Vs. 7-11 This is the Day of Atonement. All of the males had to attend this and the following feast. This is the only holy feast day when the Jews had to fast. This is when the high priest took the blood of one goat, went into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled it on the mercy seat to make atonement for the people. Then they sent the scapegoat out into the wilderness. Notice v. 11.

Vs. 12-40 These are the days of the Feast of the Tabernacles. There are some differences in the offerings of those days but each day ends with the same reminder to continue the normal offerings, morning and evening, that would be done each day.

In 29:40 it says that these instructions were given publicly. We might be saying, "Didn't I just read something like this earlier?" Yet, for many people listening now, they have never heard this before. Between chapters 19 and 20, 38-40 years passed. There are 40-year-olds who have never heard these laws, and we'll find out when we read Joshua, men who have never been circumcised. What we're reading here is the preparation of the people for entering the land. Just as a reminder for us, for the people to have come to these feasts, it meant they had to leave their homes and fields for weeks. They couldn't work and they had to trust in the Lord, as He promised, to guard their stuff. It all depended on their faith and true gratitude to the Lord for saving them. Unfortunately, once they were in the land, the people seldom celebrated some of these feasts. You just read about the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). Now, if you want something that will shock you, read Nehemiah 8:17, a thousand years later. If that doesn't make you want to cry, I don't know what will.

I think there were individuals who celebrated these things, like Boaz and Samuel's parents, but these were national events to keep the heart of the nation healthy and pulsing with love for God.

If you want to challenge yourself as a disciple, read Matthew 5-7 and realize that this was all said to the newly selected twelve disciples. I think it applies to us too. I have the feeling that when Jesus returns, He might say to the majority of the church, "you never obeyed what I told you." I was just reading about Jesus saying to His disciples in Luke 18:8, back then and in the future, *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*

In Joshua 5, the first thing the people do after they cross the Jordan will be to circumcise the men. The second thing they will do is to celebrate the Passover. The day after the Passover, the manna will cease.

One question I have in all of these instructions is that if the sacrifices called for flour, and the bread for the Holy Place needed flour, where did they get the flour? Also, if the sacrifices required wine, where did they get the wine? They had been doing this for 40 years in the wilderness, so where did they get flour and wine? I think it is safe to say that their main food was the manna. How else do you feed two to ten million people? But, if you were a merchant, or a local farmer, and you knew there were two to ten million people sitting there with money but nothing to spend it on, don't you think you'd want to help them? I'm sure that Israel became a stop, or even a main destination, on one or more caravan routes. For the sacrifices and the temple service, I'm sure they bought wine, flour and olive oil (and the occasional leek and garlic). I'm sure the people also bought cheeses (although they had plenty of milk with their flocks), veggies, flour, wine, clothing (with sheep and goats they had plenty of wool) and other stuff; but again, two million people in the wilderness, off the beaten trail, couldn't have survived solely on outside merchants.

### **Luke 3:23-38**

Luke gives Jesus' lineage from Mary, whereas Matthew uses the lineage from Joseph. Both Joseph and Mary are descendants of David. Matthew traced the lineage back through the kings of Israel. Luke traced the lineage back to David, but through one of his sons who never became the king. Luke gives the lineage here because of Jesus' baptism and anointing as King. This is the beginning of His ministry. (I'm making this up now: Maybe back in the day, when they had gladiator fights or contests, as the fighters entered the arena, they gave their credentials. I don't know. I wasn't there.) But it is interesting that Jesus' credentials are given here, and that He's about to "duke it out" with "the ruler of this world."

Notice that in vs. 32-33 we find *Nahshon the son of Amminadab*. We have read quite a lot about Nahshon in Numbers. Remember it was his sister who married Aaron the high priest (Exodus 6:23) and his son who married Rahab as recorded in Matthew 1:4-5.

Also, Luke takes the genealogy back to Adam and to God. This will fit well with Paul's writing and it shows a Gentile world that Jesus is the Savior of all men.

### **Psalm 62**

I feel like I'm living this psalm. It is very hard to get it into your head. *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation...*

Just circle the repetition of words here: *God alone, my salvation, shaken*, etc. This is a great psalm. I can imagine that as David lived those long years running from Saul, there were rumors and suggestions of help that might have come from people in Saul's government who really liked David. Or there may have been rumors that certain leading men of some of the tribes might come to his aid. None of this ever happened but it is normal for people to hope for help from others, especially when you're running for ten years.

But this is how God "pruned" David and made him the man he was, a man after God's own heart.

Vs. 1-2 This is David's *only* hope.

Vs. 3-4 David suffered because of how he was lied against and wrongly pursued.

Vs. 5-7 Take time to read this. There is the waiting in silence, the seeking of refuge and the pouring out of all of our fears and concerns. It is somehow healing just to read this and know the Lord understands and that this is all He wants when we are weak.

V. 8 As always, David praises God and exhorts everyone to trust Him and make Him their *refuge*.

Vs. 9-10 Maybe David is still talking to everyone, but this truth is also being given to us from God Himself.

Vs. 11-12 Wow! *God has spoken*. To Him belongs *power* and *steadfast love*, and He will judge. Amen.

Where is our help really found? In the western world, many people have deep resources. We have credit cards, friends, advocates, people offering services, Dr. Phil, geek squads, libraries, podcasts, Google. Basically, we have help for everything. The Lord may be the first one we call, but usually we only come before Him like this as a last resort.

As disciples, what brings us to the place where we realize, without God, there is no help, no refuge, no resource, no stability? In reality, it isn't a "what," it's a "who." For the Lord to really train us as disciples, He makes following Him in the harvest the passion we can't live without, and in that context, without Him, we can do nothing.

### **Proverbs 11:18-19**

Notice the pattern of these verses: evil, righteous, righteous, evil. I read in the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), that the sound of the words for *wages* and *reward* is very similar. The appearance of what we get in life is also very similar. We could actually think that what we gain by not following God or being "smart" and "shrewd" is a reward. But if it keeps us from God, it is death, and we've been deceived.

*It kind of makes you think of Romans 6:19-23, I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## **MARCH 20**

### **Numbers 30-31**

Numbers 30

The logical connection between this section and the last section is that, while taking part in the holy days, people would often be moved to make vows to the Lord. This happens even today. People will be listening to a sermon in church and say, "I've got to call 'so-and-so' when I get home and apologize," or if the preacher is portly they will say, "Lord, I promise to exercise more." ☺ Men and women could also make a vow to serve the Lord in the community or at the tabernacle. We'll see this in Samuel. Apparently the Levites needed the help. Anyway, this is a restating of what has already been said about vows, with the additional regulations about a woman making a vow.

Vs. 1-2 According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 250, a *vow* was a promise to do something and a *pledge* was a promise not to do something.

Vs. 3-5 This had to do with a woman who was still unmarried, in her father's house and under his authority. The familiar pattern given here is that on the day he heard of the vow he either approved by doing nothing, or disapproved by making the vow void.

Vs. 6-8 This is the situation of a single woman who has taken a vow and then marries. When her new husband learns of the vow he must make the decision to let her complete it or he has the right to make it void.

V. 9 This is a parenthetical statement about widows or divorced women. Interestingly, they are not under the authority of any man and so their vow "sticks" the minute they utter it.

Vs. 10-16 This is the case of a married woman making a vow or pledge. The interesting wrinkle here is in v. 15. The husband, not the wife, can still make the vow void at some later date, but in doing this he bears the guilt or iniquity of the broken vow. According to the law, he would have to offer sacrifices to obtain forgiveness.

Where you see this in action is 1 Samuel 1:9-18, when Hannah prays for a son and makes a vow. According to what the Lord is saying here, Elkanah had the right to either confirm or dissolve this vow shortly after hearing about it.

Also, in 1 Timothy 5 Paul alludes to some version of this that had been accepted by the church in Ephesus, where widows could make a vow of service. Apparently the younger widows were prone to break their vows the minute they found a believing boyfriend. Paul commanded Timothy to refuse to enroll younger widows.

## Numbers 31

This chapter introduces a very hard topic. It is hard for us to wrap our heads around it mentally or emotionally. Also, sometimes we have the joy of trying to explain this to the unchurched. The question is, "How could a loving God command the killing of everyone in a city, including women and children?" This chapter shows Israel going to war and gives us details on who would live and who would die. Even if you understand that the people Israel fought against were wicked and the cultures were utterly corrupt, you still have to think through the killing of children and women (why don't we really care about the guys?☹).

So, here are some leading thoughts and you can do with them what you will.

There are "realities" that exist regardless of my feelings or opinions. Gravity works whether I'm having a good day or a bad day. Regardless of my feelings, I always have to keep an eye on gravity, at least while I'm in this life. On earth as a human, there is a "spiritual world" that exists that I can't see. It's there whether I'm having a good day or a bad one. God is there and the angels, good and bad, are there. It's as real as the keyboard I'm typing on. It's a reality and someday I'll see that reality. I could see that "other side" of life right now, but to do that, the way things are set up right now, I'd have to die. The way God has designed things at this moment in history, as I am now in this body, I can't see the spiritual world. But if I leave this body by "dying," in a second I will be conscious and alive in a body in that reality, possibly seeing both the physical and spiritual reality together. This is the world and reality that the Bible teaches.

Death is the only way for us to view or enter this other "world." But what is death? I say, "I'd have to die," to see the spiritual side of life, but I'd actually be "alive" there. So if I'm alive here, and then, a second later, I'd be alive there, what is death? Death is separation. Physically, it is the separation of the soul from the body. Spiritually, death is the separation of man from God. In reality we are never, "not living." As humans, during this time, we are either on earth, visually separated from God, or separated from this earth, visually present with God. But we are never

dead. This is reality regardless of how I feel. "Death" in a physical sense, is whatever happens to our body that causes the moment of separation, the moment of transition of our spirit from this reality to that reality. But the reality is, we are always "alive" and there is only one reality, with two parts (for us) and there is only one God.

Separation was never meant to be, either from God or from the body. "Death" is an unnatural thing in God's universe and will be done away with. Humans were never created to be separated from God. Whatever that union with God looks like, even saved, we have not yet experienced it. When Adam broke that union, "death," a separation, occurred immediately, like plucking a flower; and though it happened slowly, the body had to decline and decay to the point of the spirit separating from the body. The one separation necessitated the other. No one was ever born "not" to have a relationship with God. No one was ever to have a failing body from which the human spirit could be separated. For now, we rightfully fight against "death;" because it isn't normal, or what was designed by God.

Our fear of "death" stems from our sin and separation from God. We inwardly fear God. Our sin rebels against God. We can't see beyond this small room (called earth and life) that we live in. Actually, "life" is so much bigger than this "tiny room" that we think is all of reality. Yet fear tells us this is all there is, and sin tells us we can't face God. So we are trapped in fear, in a small little slice of reality, thinking it is everything.

When the body "dies," the soul is separated from this body and we move from the small room into the big room. The Bible teaches that when we step into "life," as Jesus calls "the next life" in John 3, we are fully alert. Some people will become fully alert for the first time in their lives. And we will have a body. We don't even go "bodiless" for more than a second. After that second of separation from the body, every man, woman and child enters God's world; and that, theoretically, is a great thing, right? There's the rub.

Now, God is against murder and holds life to be valuable and sacred for us on earth. But God is about to "call" Moses into His presence. Moses will "die" but not really be dead. As disciples, we know that God has the right to "call" us at any time, and we'll be going to a great place. Paul couldn't wait to get there. If God called you away to work in Argentina for the rest of your life, you'd miss your friends and family, and they would miss you, but you wouldn't be dead. You'd just be living somewhere else. Heaven, God's presence, is "somewhere else," and it's a great place, unless you're not ready to "meet your Maker."

In the wars Israel would wage, there was an "object lesson" for all mankind, that societies and cultures can so pollute themselves, that only total cleansing from the earth can stop their sinful influence, like cutting out cancer. Sin in this body cannot be cured in this life (Rom. 7-8) and its power can't be broken by education or reform. Its power could only be "broken" by willing repentance and acceptance of the one true God, revealed then as Yahweh, the God of the Jews. Now, the power of sin is only broken through acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, which gives us forgiveness, allowing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We become connected to God, but the power of sin is there until death and resurrection. (Read Romans 7-8.)

In these wars that Israel fought, there is the lesson that sin can permeate a culture and society in such a way that God will bring judgment. All the nations around Israel will see this. All the nations knew that Canaan was corrupt, and now they'll see Yahweh bring judgment. In demanding the deaths of these peoples, in reality, God was saying, "Their time on earth is complete, send them into My presence and I will judge them." It's not a bad thing to be in God's presence, unless we're not ready to be there. We get caught up with visual images of slaying and slicing and blood and guts, but the result was to send these people to God. They never stopped living. They came into God's world and God took the matter from there.

Physical "death" is not something God likes, and it's not something we'll get used to. Christ removed the "sting" from death by dying for us and facing our judgment "unjudged." In Christ, we who *know* Him will also be "unjudged." We think of death and think of how unfair it is that someone can't live on earth, but reality is far bigger than this earth, and earth isn't really a good place anyway. Heaven is not "on" earth; in fact, when this sad episode is finished here, God will get rid of this earth and make a new, uncontaminated one.

Obviously God wants us to be compassionate and show mercy to victims of war, tsunamis, disasters, sicknesses and hunger. We are commanded to show love and to assist those suffering on earth. But we disciples cannot live with a microscopic view of life, as if this time and life on earth is everything. Reality is much larger, and this sad tale on earth is a very important, but very temporary, dot on the surface of eternity. The destiny of every person ever born is to bow before Jesus and confess that He is Lord. God Himself determines when that event happens. We have a choice in whether our confession is compelled from us in heaven, or surrendered freely here on earth, in repentance and acceptance of Christ. As disciples, in the age of grace, we work in the harvest while there is still time. Judgment and wrath are coming to the earth, and for many, before the throne of God.

God is a loving God, but the killing will always seem harsh. It helps to keep the bigger picture in mind. In God commanding the "deaths" of these people, there was the fearful "lesson" to the other nations to fear sin and respect Yahweh; and there was the mission of Israel to send these people from their bodies, from this small room to that great room, into the presence of God.

*Back to Numbers 31*

Vs. 1-7 God has Moses avenge Israel against the Midianites. What they did was a big thing. They sought to get God to curse His people and they found a way. How they did it might have circulated around the nations. This would show the nations not to mess with God.

Notice that Phinehas leads them into battle.

Vs. 8-12 Among the kings of Midian who they killed, they also killed Balaam. What was he doing in Midian? He must have come back and been given money and a "house full of gold" for giving such good advice on how to make Israel bring God's curse upon themselves. Now he was standing in the presence of God with no gold and in a lot of trouble.

Vs. 13-18 Somehow Moses had the full story on what had happened up on the mountains and what was said between Balaam and Balak. Either God told Moses, or Moses interviewed someone who was there, like Balaam. In 2 Samuel 1, you have the story of the guy who came to David in Ziklag reporting the details of Saul's death, who was immediately thereafter "dispatched" to join Balaam. They probably both got together in the hot part of Hades and said, "Yeh, me too. I thought when I told them the whole story, they'd let me go."

There is an interesting thought here. In order for so many men from Israel to have sinned sexually so quickly, the Midianites must have had a lot of women on the job. Apparently once they had the plan from Balaam, they sent *all* of the women into the Israelite camp to set up "worship stations" in the name of Baal, and thousands of the women participated. It makes you wonder what kind of moral climate that must have been, being willing to sell themselves for Baal and country, to bring a curse on their enemies.

All the *males* were killed, old and young, because males carried on the national identity of this culture. Remember they were still alive, just sent into God's presence. If the children were under the age of accountability, they were not judged (Romans 7:9). The rest of these people had somehow heard about Yahweh. Balak knew to send for Balaam, because Balaam had a link to the same God of the Israelites who Balak knew about. Abe-Isaac-Jacob became a large group of people who lived in Canaan over 200 years. Melchizedek, a priest of the Most High God, was the

king in Salem (Jerusalem); and God was giving testimony to His own name through many men, like Balaam, who we have never heard of. Not to mention that just down the road, for the past 40 years, you had this community of two to ten million people whose God had, to their liking and the joy of all in that ancient world, demolished Egypt. We have some evidence, and have to trust God, that they had opportunities to come to Him. BTW, Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite priest who probably became a believer, and this would have been some of the same territory where Moses would have tended sheep for 40 years.

Regarding the captured women - in Deuteronomy 21 the Lord will give them laws on how to incorporate all captured women into the nation. Since these people were not Canaanites (they were actually descendants of Abraham), these women could have been brought into Israel. The reason the women with sexual experience were killed here was because they had participated in the event at Peor.

The young girls who were taken would have become servants of the people or employed in the service of the tabernacle and absorbed into the culture and populace of the nation. God gave laws on how they were to treat these people.

Vs. 19-20 Remember the laws of cleansing and the water of uncleanness that God gave instructions about? Here is how they were to be used.

Vs. 25-47 The Lord Himself instituted some rules/laws regarding how to divide the captured goods and people. Everything was to be tithed. The goods and people were divided in half, between the soldiers who fought and the people who stayed at home. The soldiers tithed 1/500<sup>th</sup> of their stuff to the priests. The people tithed 1/50<sup>th</sup> of their stuff to the Levites.

Vs. 48-54 When the officers of the army counted their men and realized that they hadn't lost a single soldier, they were moved with gratefulness to God and brought a free-will offering to God of the jewelry and precious metals and stones they had gathered.

Thankfully, following Christ in the harvest, the only death we are to seek is that of our "old self," and to carry our cross, presenting ourselves, living, on the altar before God. And if we "die," we actually burst into life in the presence of our Savior. Like Paul, that entrance into His presence, to see Him face to face, is something each of us should be looking forward to.

### **Luke 4:1-30**

Vs. 1- 2 As mentioned before, Jesus, the newly anointed Son of Man and King of the earth, was driven by the Spirit to have a showdown with the "god of this age." Satan waited until opportune times. There may have been more temptations, but these are the key temptations.

Vs. 3-4 It is interesting that Satan asked Jesus to prove He was the Son of God. In the mind of every Jew, whether they really believed it or not, they understood that the Messiah would be the Son of God. Look at John 1:49 and John 11:27. Jesus, as a man, depended on God for His provision.

Vs. 5-8 Jesus would have had this anyway. Satan was offering Him a way to avoid suffering and God's will. Notice that Jesus showed that worship (lit., bend the knee) necessitated service. They always go together, or should.

Vs. 9-13 Matthew and Luke have a different order to the temptations. Both have the bread first, but they differ in the next two. Since Matthew wrote with an agenda to show that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews, and since he takes some other events out of their chronological order, I'm going to suggest that Luke has the right order. It really doesn't matter. My thinking is that Satan was fed up with hearing *It is written*, so he quoted Scripture to Jesus to lure Him into putting God to the test. Ironically, if you catch the double meaning in Jesus' words, Satan was the one who was putting God to the test.

Between the temptation and Jesus' visit to Nazareth, comes John 1-4. A lot of relationship was formed between Jesus and the disciples during this time.

Vs. 14-15 This is a declaration of victory. Now His public ministry would begin and He would present Himself to Israel as their Messiah.

Vs. 16-30 Following a great victory came a great rejection. John mentions this in John 1:11, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*

Vs. 18-19 These are such amazing verses. Jesus was fulfilling them as He stood there. Following Jesus in the harvest, this is also what His disciples, today, are supposed to do.

To me, it is amazing that some people today present Jesus as a vague teacher with a hidden, indistinct message. Boy, the people in Nazareth sure got the point. Obviously, Jesus touched on their spiritual blindness and their Jewish nationalism, but the change in "temperature" was immediate. I remember hearing Bill Hybels say that if you preach self-esteem at church, it's 85 and sunny. If you preach discipleship, it's 32 and falling. Even among believers, if the message is too oriented toward the Great Commission and discipleship, you quickly see who is anchored in their "own" definition of following Jesus in their "rightness," and who is humbly willing to forsake all and follow their Savior into the harvest. One person becomes your critic and the other becomes a disciple of Jesus.

These are the people Jesus grew up with, pushing Him out of the city, taking Him to the hill to kill Him. Once Jesus allowed them to demonstrate their hearts and fully show their intentions, He supernaturally turned about and walked through the middle of the crowd and no one laid a hand on Him.

### **Psalm 63**

This is another of these psalms, where, except for the last three verses, this is the crying out of my heart for the day.

Vs. 1-4 This is a long confession to God that He is David's hope. What a wonderful expression of who God should be to all of us. Remember though, it took suffering to bring David to this place. There is a price to pay if this is what we want our devotion to God to look like. Working in the harvest will do this for us.

Vs. 5-8 David must have had some moments of peace in his flight from Saul. In this quietness he confesses his satisfaction with the Lord's care. Verse 6 also describes how the Lord became so rooted in David's heart.

Vs. 9-11 At this place of peace, knowing that he could be on the run again, David's confidence was in God. Amen.

### **Proverbs 11:20-21**

We value things like being street smart and being able to figure stuff out. What about Christians who are just naïve, who really don't get it, who are just blameless and innocent before God? We usually see them as prey, as somebody's lunch, and we roll our eyes and laugh at their dumbness. They are like Forrest Gump. But God loves the Christian Forrest Gumps who are dumb and blameless before Him. They go through life, following Christ in the harvest; and God just blesses them, even in their sorrows and trials.

For the wicked it's like the irritation when you're driving a long stretch of city traffic with "thousands" of traffic lights. You drive like crazy, weaving in and out of lanes trying to make a light, trying to be wise and crafty. But somewhere, miles ago, you passed this old guy or old woman, driving under the speed limit, just moving along. "Ha, Ha! Left him in the dust. The dummy doesn't know he needs to drive faster, smarter, like me." By the time you get to your

destination, you're sweaty, you've given yourself another ulcer and you've made several enemies. As you pull into the parking lot you notice that the old dude just passed you. Not only did you not save 30 seconds with all your traffic gymnastics, but guess who God delighted in? And they just passed you.

## **MARCH 21**

### **Numbers 32:1-33:39**

#### Numbers 32

Vs. 1-5 The people of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh ask for the land they have just captured on the east side of the Jordan. This is their formal request. Note that this is a request and not a rebellious declaration. Something was learned in those 38 years since Kadesh-barnea.

Vs. 6-15 Moses' words to them have one big point: the rebellion of the few brings God's anger on the many. Notice that Moses doesn't use an argument against them, but rather the story of their own history. Moses mentions the cause/effect danger of what they "might" be doing in vs. 14-15. The effect on the people would be as it was 38 years earlier - discouragement and a bitter heart. Moses recounts the history of Kadesh-barnea, mentioning how that resulted in what they have just lived through for 40 years, and that Caleb and Joshua were the only survivors.

Vs. 16-26 The story had a happy ending because these tribes were not rebelling; they were asking. They were seeking the Lord and seeking permission to do this. In the 40 years, seeing the older generation die because of their rebellion, and understanding every day that their situation came to them because of the report of 10 men, had ingrained in them that if they sin, others will suffer. These tribes represent what every person in the camp knew and felt. It also shows that they were developing a heart to ask God instead of trying to "complain" Him into submission. God shows Himself to be very flexible and accommodating here.

Vs. 28-32 With a decision of this magnitude, communication was vital and it was important that Moses was still the man in charge. Even though God allowed it, it could have caused bitterness; but with Moses heading up the communication and making this known, it didn't look like new leadership making a bad decision.

Vs. 33-42 Moses was even able to lead Joshua and Eleazar through the exercise of dividing the land for these tribes. In a way, that was also God's mercy on Moses. He wouldn't enter the land, but God allowed him to enjoy some of the process and to train the men who would go beyond him.

God gave Israel the victories they needed to encourage them before they entered the land, and the fighting men of Reuben, Gad and 1/2 Manasseh would cross over the Jordan ready to rumble. And, they would be a source of encouragement for Joshua.

I think it is kind of neat that Joshua and Caleb were two of the oldest men in the camp. Both would have been 80+ and both were godly leaders; in fact, we'll see that Caleb still has "attitude."

As disciples, this history of Israel provides important lessons to learn about spiritual group dynamics. Criticism, bitterness and pride never, never take us in the right direction. Personally it hurts us in our growth in Christ and our service and focus in His harvest. This sin kills the harvest of a group. If a group of people is reaching no one, something happened. Look for it. If we personally are not reaching out and reaching out with a group, we're on the wrong track. It took God 40 years to develop a heart of obedience in these people so that they were willing to focus on following Him, and to bring them to the understanding of each person's responsibility to the entire people.

For us as disciples in the harvest, life on earth should be very simple. We follow Christ into the harvest with a group of people, telling lost people what the Lord has done for us and how they can come to know Christ. As people come to Christ, we help them become disciples, who make disciples in the harvest. So why is this really very complicated for many churches and believers? That's good food for thought.

### Numbers 33

Just for fun, without looking online or in another book, try to figure out how many times they moved.

Many of these places where they camped were just "areas" in the wilderness and can be referred to by several names. I'll do some leg work for you. They rebelled, we are told later, at Kadesh-barnea. After 38 years of wandering they return to Kadesh-barnea where Miriam dies. So where was Kadesh-barnea in this list, the first time? If you go back to the rebellion, in Numbers 13:16, they have just left Hazeroth (where Miriam had leprosy) and arrived at the desert of Paran. In our list today, Paran is called Rithmah. Rithmah must be some landmark at Kadesh-barnea. Now that you have that piece of the puzzle, figure out how many times they moved before and after Rithmah.

It's interesting in Psalm 90, a psalm Moses wrote about all the wilderness years, he says *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.* (Psalm 90:1) Where do you dwell? Now think of David in The Psalms. Where would David want to dwell? I think Moses and David dwelt in the same place.

Vs. 38-39 are actually Numbers 20. Both Miriam and Aaron died that year, four months apart. This is how you can figure out the time lapse between chapters 19 and 20.

### **Luke 4:31-5:11**

The events here launched Jesus into being followed by the masses. Before these events, there were no great crowds following Him. After these events, Jesus and the disciples will seldom have time to themselves. It is no accident then that Jesus began asking men to become permanent followers who began to assist Him in His work.

Also, Mark and Luke have these events reversed chronologically. Notice that 5:1 says, *On one occasion...* This means that this story is probably not in order but is put here to mark the occasion where Jesus personally called Peter, Andrew, James and John. Jesus already knew these men, and they had already had some adventures together in John 1-4. I think Mark has the right chronology, and Luke is showing logically why Jesus needed to call the disciples. Both events happened, it seems, in the same week.

### Luke 4:31-44

Vs. 31-37 In Capernaum in this synagogue Jesus' mass ministry was launched by driving out this demon. Reports were already going out about Him, but there was something about this event that caused the news to begin circulating rapidly.

Vs. 38-39 Jesus had already stayed at Peter's house, but from here on out, Peter's house would be His base of operations in Capernaum.

Vs. 40-41 This great crowd was just the city. When Jesus returned to Capernaum, this kind of gathering at Peter's house would become a regular event, as it was the day the paralytic was healed.

Vs. 42-44 Jesus rose early and evaded the crowd, knowing they would have kept Him from leaving. This would be the first preaching tour He took the disciples on.

Luke 5:1-11

This, I think, is a flashback. If this was a TV show, it would say, “Three days earlier.”

Vs. 1-3 Notice that Luke identifies the Sea of Galilee by its Gentile name. That Jesus was teaching here was incidental to what follows with Peter and the boys.

Vs. 4-5 Here is the point. Jesus was “presumably” a novice in fishing. Experienced fishermen labored all night and sat by for hours as Jesus taught. Now He was finished. They had done their good deed and finished their work (multi-tasking); the nets were ready for tomorrow. Now they could go home, eat and get ready for the night of fishing ahead. Then, of all things, Jesus tells the pros to go out into the deep in the heat of the day and throw their newly cleaned nets in the water. To Peter’s credit, he did it. Now, it should be mentioned that Peter had seen the water turned into wine and had probably seen other miracles in Jerusalem and in Capernaum when Jesus stayed there with His family after the marriage in Cana.

Vs. 6-7 The key word of faith here is, *when they had done this*. The partners in the boat on land were the Zebedees. James, John and their father were partners with Peter. Later that day when Jesus called James and John, Mark tells us they were in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Here the nets are tearing.

Vs. 8-11 Peter fell at Jesus’ knees because Jesus was probably knee deep in fish. Notice what the call to Peter was. It was to catch men. That’s what disciples are supposed to do in following Jesus (switching metaphors) into the harvest. It was no small thing for Peter (and Andrew, James and John) to get the boat to land, hand it off to the workers and probably Peter’s and James’ fathers, and then to leave everything and follow Jesus.

I know this is theoretical, but would we have that same faith to follow Jesus in the harvest, or do our stuff, our sources of income and security own us?

### **Psalm 64**

What a contrast to the last psalm.

Vs. 1-6 David is in distress. Maybe it was the next day or next week. There was danger and the lies and threats of the enemy had shaken him. His cry to God for help includes the catalog of the arrogance of these people who are pursuing David.

Vs. 7-8 David wouldn’t work to fight or judge these people, but David was confident that God would. He did.

Vs. 9-10 It takes getting to these verses before David had something to praise God for. David didn’t know when God would vindicate him, but he knew that when He did, it would be visible and all men would fear and learn to put their trust in the Lord. Those who were righteous would learn to take refuge in the Lord.

The psalm itself is a picture of what really brings praise, trust and understanding. It is not until we are so weighed down and desperate, and we have endured, holding on and waiting on the Lord, that we can know this kind of rejoicing. Only when we have taken refuge in Him and seen His vindication, will we be able to praise Him like this. Then the words of v. 10 will flow from our hearts.

### **Proverbs 11:22**

God said it. This is a weird kind of image if you think about it. It doesn't compare the woman to the pig, but to a gold ring in a pig's nose. The beauty of the ring can't hide the pig. So, in this proverb, what is this big, crass, dirty, and for the Jew, unclean animal that can't be hidden or dressed up? It is the woman’s lack of discretion and godly wisdom.

## MARCH 22

### Numbers 33:40-35:34

#### Numbers 33:40-56

Vs. 40-49 This is a continuation from yesterday's overview of Israel's wanderings. Verse 40 is the event mentioned in Numbers 21.

Vs. 48-49 This is the final place Moses would lead them to. You see that it is on the east side of the Jordan, opposite Jericho. At this point Jericho was probably experiencing a "level orange" alert status.

Vs. 50-56 God has Moses tell the people what they are to do in taking possession of the land. Part of their job was to cleanse the land. God was judging the people of Canaan and those people knew this. Israel had been in the wilderness for 40 years and so everyone knew about Israel. When the spies talk to Rehab in Jericho, we'll find out that the people in Canaan knew this was coming. The people could have fled from God's judgment.

In this description is a sense of joy and fulfillment. They would take possession of the land promised to Abraham and it was a nice place.

But, God gives them the first of many warnings to make sure they drive the people completely out of the land. This wasn't just God giving Israel someone else's land. God was punishing these people. His witness to the Canaanites was finished, and they hadn't listened to Melchizedek and others. This people, these cultures, were sick and were to be cleansed out of the land. Israel is warned, and the sad thing is that we know they won't listen. Israel, along with many of its kings, including Solomon, will be idolaters. Idolatry won't be removed from Israel until after the Babylonian exile.

#### Numbers 34

Vs. 1-12 This isn't all of Israel, but just the land the 9.5 tribes will divide. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and 1/2 Manasseh occupy the eastern side of the Jordan. There is a map at the end of this document, from Wikipedia, that shows the boundaries of Israel as given here and then later in Ezekiel 47.

Keep in mind that these boundaries do not include what Abraham was promised in Genesis 15:8. David would come close to what was promised Abe during his reign, though David only received tribute from some of those northern areas. During the Millennial Kingdom the full promise to Abraham will be realized.

V. 11 The Sea of Chinnereth is the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 13-15 This is what the 2.5 tribes would possess *toward the sunrise*.

Vs. 16-29 It is interesting that the Lord selected these men. Joshua and Eleazar were the leaders, and right up there with them, mentioned first, is Caleb.

#### Numbers 35

Vs. 1-8 The Levitical cities were not just places for the Levites to live. God could have put them all around the tabernacle like He did in the wilderness. Instead, the Levites were spread out among the people and were supposed to have a good influence on the nation, copying the books of Moses and teaching the people the Bible. The tithes that came in wouldn't have been enough to care for all of the Levites, so the people were to share their land and cities with them. This really presupposed that the people had faith in God to follow and understood the importance of the Levites.

Vs. 9-15 The *cities of refuge* were interesting. What hit me was the idea that even in an accidental death, there was an avenger who would seek out the killer. Even if it were proven that the death was a totally freak accident and the "killer" was innocent, he had to live in the city and couldn't go outside until the high priest died. If he did stray outside and the avenger was still mad, the avenger could kill him without penalty. Sounds like Texas. Apparently, even in accidental death it would be looked at as God taking a hand in the action, calling one person to stand in His presence, and assigning the other person to live in a city of refuge for the rest of his life. This was an object lesson. Life was sacred and guilt was upon anyone who took a life.

Imagine what this law should have meant for David and for his son Absalom, both of whom were murderers.

Vs. 16-21 This was the description of death by murder.

Vs. 22-29 This was the case of someone who accidentally killed someone.

Vs. 30-34 This is an amazing statement by God. In all of what is explained here, you can see a connection to us and our sin. If our sin and guilt before God can only be paid for by our life or blood, the only thing that could save us would be a ransom in the form of the blood of a holy redeemer. That is the message we take with us into the harvest. It is what Jesus did for us to save us. Without Him, like the person mentioned in this section, each of us could only pay for our sin with our own death and condemnation before God.

### **Luke 5:12-28**

Vs. 12-16 We've seen this story before. After telling the people in Nazareth that the only person ever cured of leprosy was a Syrian, Jesus heals the first Israelite leper, who promptly disobeys Him. From what we have read in Leviticus, if you touched a leper you would be unclean. Not only did Jesus cleanse the leper, but He laid His hand upon him. Jesus was showing the Jews, and Luke is showing the nations, that Jesus was not only compassionate, but that He had power to cleanse because He was the holy Son of God. He couldn't be made "unclean."

Vs. 17-26 What is interesting here are the visitors. This is early in His ministry, and Jesus had already had a run-in with the leaders in Jerusalem. They even sent Nicodemus to interview Jesus. Now the Jews (Jewish leaders) were investigating Him again. Those words, "Arise, take up your pallet and walk," will become haunting when these same leaders hear them again in Jerusalem coming out of the mouth of a man who has just been healed. When they say, "Who is the man who told you....," they will be remembering this incident. See John 5.

It is interesting that in Numbers 35:30-34, it says that there was no ransom for someone who had shed blood. But here we have Jesus saying that He has the authority to forgive sins. The way He would do that is through the shedding of His own blood, to pay for sin and to ransom us.

Vs. 27-28 Levi was ready to follow, knowing that Jesus was willing to stand against the religious authorities and accept him. If Jesus had compassion for a leper and a paralytic and was willing to touch them and forgive them, then He must be accepting of tax collectors too. The fact that Jesus' choice of disciples was to the lower, less educated people might have been overlooked as a noble thing. But to choose a tax collector as a disciple was almost criminal.

The thing that excites me about following Christ in the harvest is that our message is such that all can understand it and grasp it regardless of culture, education or class. In fact, Jesus thanked the Father that the truth was hidden from the "wise and understanding," and was instead, revealed to babes. It still mystifies me that one person hears the Word and it does little for him and another person hears the same Word, and it ignites him to follow Christ and give everything to serve Him in the harvest. There is a spiritual decision and a spiritual love for Christ that transcends every barrier or human qualification.

## Psalm 65

This is a true psalm of praise and worship from David. There is no threat or danger. The fact that Zion is mentioned gives me the sense that this is after David was king of the entire nation and before he fell in the situation with Bathsheba. These were times of experiencing the rewards of waiting on the Lord and seeing the greatness of His deliverance and blessings.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 841, suggests that this may have been a worship song to have been sung yearly at the Feast of the Firstfruits, or as it was also called, the Feast of Weeks, or as it was also called, Pentecost. Now, thinking about Pentecost and the birth of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the joy and thankfulness this psalm expresses should be ours because of the presence of the Spirit in our hearts as we follow Christ in the harvest.

Vs. 1-4 Notice that in this praise it mentions that *all flesh* (all people) will come to God. So often when David expresses His praise of God's greatness, it becomes an offer for all nations. That is the continuance of the promise to Adam and Eve as seen in the promise to Abraham. All nations will be blessed.

Notice that David not only mentions the atoning for sin, but, as he has said so often, also the desire he had to dwell in God's courts and in His house.

Vs. 5-8 The *God of our salvation* is also *the hope of all the ends of the earth*. His ability to save is shown in that as creator, all the forces of creation have to bow to Him. And even with all this power, God's signs of His power and control are seen in the joy of every morning and every evening.

Vs. 9-13 David expressed God's love toward mankind in providing all the elements of the harvest, from the first drop of rain, to the final shout of joy. It all is a result of God's grace and blessing. I wonder how many of us appreciate that.

## Proverbs 11:23

The *desire of the righteous* is formed by the desire of God. This truth has nothing to do with acquiring stuff or seeking peace and comfort. This person could be poor and unknown, but because of the love of God and following Christ, his will is to do God's will; and so it always ends in good, and eventually, life forever with God.

For the *wicked*, Jesus said they shall not see life. To think of the irony of living 80 years and never having seen life. And then too, the *wrath* of God rests upon them. And, so we keep on praying and working in the harvest.

## MARCH 23

### Numbers 36

You did it! You finished the first four books of the Bible! If you're up to date in your reading, great. If not, don't sweat it. It literally takes you two or three years to get into shape, to lay down the daily habits; and the only way you do that is by getting behind and coming up with ways to stay on target.

Numbers concludes with the tribe of Manasseh. I don't think this story is put here for trivia. It demonstrates that people learned to seek the Lord and ask for modifications of the laws He had given. First the daughters came to Moses the right way, then the leaders of the tribe asked for an amendment, and finally the daughters complied and did the right thing.

This story was to show that the people now knew to come to God and His appointed representatives, to get answers instead of complaining or doing their own thing. It will be sort of

funny in Joshua to see the people come after Joshua for making a decision without consulting the Lord. They got the message.

## Deuteronomy 1

One more book to go and you have read the Pentateuch! The Penta-who? The Jewish name for the first five books. Again, as you've seen so far, these books are rich in helping us, as disciples, see the heart of God as the plan of redemption unfolds. There are lots of foundational truths, biographies, stories and symbols. And all of what we find here helps us see the great heart of God, our Savior.

Deuteronomy is one big final speech to the people. These are Moses' final words to the nation he shepherded out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years. At the beginning they were 2,000,000+ rebellious, disorganized people. Now Israel is an obedient nation. They will never be this devoted to God again, until the Tribulation and the return of Christ.

One of the things to look for here is the phrase, *the Lord our God*, or *the Lord your God*. At some point in Jewish history the Jews stopped saying the name Yahweh and coded it to be the word "Lord." What Moses is actually saying here is "Yahweh our God." This is powerful. Yahweh is personal and compassionate. He, the ever-living One, has let the people call Him by His name. God is the word, "Elohim," powerful and almighty. So if you are interested, underline every time you find the phrase, *the Lord our God*. There are a few of them and they are not filler in Moses' sermon. These words have great meaning.

Vs. 1-5 Moses is recounting their history, telling the people how they came to this place, both physically and spiritually.

From Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-barnea was only an eleven-day journey. That is when and where they should have entered the land. Now, 40 years later, Moses was standing with the people opposite Jericho. Notice the references to the battles against Sihon and Og. This is a significant notation, since, as we'll see, one of these guys was a giant.

Vs. 6-18 Now Moses will recount their spiritual journey to this place.

Vs. 6-8 This was God telling the people to go to Kadesh-barnea to take possession of the promise to Abraham. Notice the mention of the Euphrates. The promise to Abraham included the land to the Euphrates.

Vs. 9-18 Because of God's vast blessing on the people, God multiplied them into a nation. This section seems to summarize God organizing them as a nation with different levels of organization and government. Not only this, but there was also the organization of the nation around the worship of God. They were ready to enter the land.

Vs. 19-46 This is a retelling of the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. This isn't just information. It is telling the people what the spiritual condition was and how that led to their spiritual journey in the wilderness.

V. 22 Notice that Moses says it was the idea of the people to spy out the land. In itself, there was nothing wrong with that request and God allowed it, but we know it really came from a heart of fear and unbelief.

Vs. 26-28 This was the effect of the ten spies on the entire nation.

Notice also in v. 29 that giants are mentioned.

V. 36 Notice that God promised Caleb that He would give him the land where he had walked. That was giant country. I'll bet Caleb couldn't wait to take a bead on those huge targets.

V. 37 Moses blamed their rebelliousness as part of the reason God wouldn't allow him to enter the land. This is parenthetical since the rebellion at Kadesh occurred 38 years earlier, but it was spurred on by the same kind of bitterness and complaining of the people.

Vs. 41-46 This again is showing the present generation how the previous generation ruined their own hope by continual rebellion against the Lord.

As disciples, we really should be about the future, working to reach lost people and to make them disciples. Still, it is good to look at history, personally or as a church. When was our faith fresh? If it isn't fresh anymore, what happened? When was the church on target? Was it reaching people? Did it only grow through transfer growth? What have we lost? What do we need to do? I've seen two churches totally ignore their history and refuse to accept what happened to them. It's not in the Bible, but it is true, that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. In Christ there is a very cool "reset" button. That reset button is being broken in Him: His grace, His love, His forgiveness, His freedom, His mission. In any culture on earth, in any time period, newly abiding in Him, His Word, and His Spirit will put our lives on the right track, following Him in the harvest.

### **Luke 5:29-6:11**

Luke 5:29-39

Vs. 29-32 The healing of the paralytic, the calling of Matthew and this party happened very near to each other.

Apparently Matthew was well off and wanted his tax collector and sinner friends to meet Jesus. The Pharisees went after Jesus' disciples first, and Jesus told them that He didn't come to call the "righteous." The Pharisees didn't get it and they weren't satisfied either.

Vs. 33-39 Then the Pharisees went to the disciples of John the Baptist to create a division between the followers of John and the followers of Jesus. In Matthew, it is the disciples of John who ask the question, but here it is the Pharisees. The Pharisees must have gone to John's disciples and led them to Jesus, probably initiating the conversation. Jesus' words in these parables would have been understandable to the disciples of John, but the Pharisees would have missed the point. If you read the end of John 3, you'll know why. John the Baptist himself used the bridegroom illustration with his disciples. The minute they would have heard Jesus use this parable, John's disciples would have connected Jesus' words with John's and it would have made them feel better, not bitter.

Jesus' second Passover, mentioned as the "feast" in John 5, happens here before Luke 6. If you read John 5:12, notice the words of the Pharisees, *Who is the man who said to you, "take up your bed and walk?"*

Luke 6:1-11

Vs. 1-5 According to John 5:16, *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.*

The event of healing on the Sabbath gave the Jews (Jewish religious leaders) something to go after Jesus about. It gave their irrationalism something to justify itself.

In these verses, Jesus and His disciples are walking back to Jerusalem after the Passover. Apparently these are Pharisees from Capernaum who are walking with them. The key phrase here is in v. 5. Jesus has told them that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin. Now He tells them that *the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*

Vs. 6-11 Matthew mentions that this synagogue was the synagogue belonging to these particular Pharisees. It appears that this event was set up, trying to trap Jesus. Matthew 12:9-14 gives a better picture of what happened here.

If you read John 5 you'll see that the Pharisees had already decided they had to get rid of Jesus after His actions in Jerusalem. Now they will be constantly following Him, looking for something. These two occasions gave them the necessary proof and motivation to plan Jesus' death. Ironically, He had told them that He was both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

### **Psalm 66**

It doesn't say who wrote this or when it was written, but you could imagine that this was written by David sometime after all of his running had ended. Now, David was King of Israel as God had promised him at least 20 years earlier.

Vs. 1-4 Notice that this is a call to all peoples and nations to give praise to God.

Vs. 5-7 What the Lord had done was not only seen in His might in creation; but in protecting David, it was like God protecting the children of Israel coming out of Egypt.

Vs. 8-12 Although this sounds like it could have also been written about Israel coming into the land, until David became king, Israel was always an oppressed people. Notice that all the peoples were called to bless God for His deliverance.

Vs. 13-15 This sounds like David. During those years on the run, David had made promises and longed to be in the tabernacle. It was probably during this time of running that David vowed that if he ever became king, he would build a temple, a house for the Lord.

Vs. 16-20 I think this is clearly David. What great praise and what a hope we have. I was reading this morning as Jesus told His disciples a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart. I think that is David's message also.

### **Proverbs 11:24-26**

Sounds like the Lord is giving us a good argument for tithing and being generous. Again, Jesus told His disciples to use "unrighteous mammon" and the things that belong to God (everything) for the glory of God and for His kingdom. We are to spend generously in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples.

## **MARCH 24**

### **Deuteronomy 2-3**

These two chapters are a review, but from God's perspective. You've read about these events as history, but now Moses is explaining the events from his and the Lord's perspective. It's an interesting slant on things.

#### Deuteronomy 2

Vs. 1-8 This is Israel passing through the land of Edom. Although we read about this event earlier, there are a couple of interesting additions here. First, in v. 29 it says that Esau allowed Israel to pass through. The Edomites didn't let Israel pass through the middle of their country on the King's Highway, but they did let Israel pass through on the eastern edge of their territory.

V. 7 Along with the command not to fight with Edom because of the relationship between Jacob and Esau, the other reason not to fight was God's blessing. Not only did they not need anything because of what God was doing for them daily, but He had already promised them a land of their own.

Vs. 9-17 This was Israel passing through the territory of Moab. Israel wasn't supposed to fight against them or take their land because they were descended from Lot.

Vs. 10-12 This is an editorial note added later by someone like Samuel, for example. These lands were full of giants. Remember that the spies said there were giants in the land and they couldn't fight against them? The Emim or the Rephaim and the Anakim were giants. Notice what happened to them. Apparently Israel was the only one afraid of them. The Moabites and Edomites knew that big guys make big targets.

It is interesting that the editorial note was placed here, because the next words have to do with the faithless men who caused the people to be afraid of the giants.

Vs. 13-15 It took about two years for the people to get organized under God and move to Kadesh-barnea where they rebelled. It was 38 years and some months before they were finally ready to enter the land. Not all 40 years were punishment.

V. 16 God made it His own project to eliminate that generation of people, using them as examples while preparing the next generation

Vs. 17-23 This was Israel passing through the territory of Ammon. These too were descendants of Lot.

Vs. 20-23 Notice the parenthesis. This too is a later editorial note, probably either from Joshua or Samuel. Once in the land they had the details of who had been dispossessed by the Ammonites. Oddly enough, many of these groups of people were giants.

Vs. 24-37 God had already planned to give Sihon's lands to Israel. Sihon's arrogance must have been stoked by the fact that Israel hadn't fought with the other nations they passed through. God hardened Sihon's own hardness and showed Israel that He could help them against a formidable army.

V. 36 Notice that one of the cities they took was fortified with high walls. This was another reason the 10 spies said to stay out of the land.

### Deuteronomy 3

Vs. 1-11 In this account, once again, the report of the ten spies was laid to rest. In v. 5 they took several high-walled, fortified cities. And then in v. 7, there was the issue of Og himself. (Who names their kid "Og?") His bed may have been the coffin he had prepared for himself. In any case, he was a big guy. A cubit was 18 inches, so 9 cubits puts him at 13.5 feet. I'll bet that's why no one made fun of his name.

Vs. 12-17 This is the giving of the conquered lands to Reuben, Gad and 1/2 Manasseh. This was a foretaste of what would happen in the land. The people had seen the battles, the booty, and 2.5 tribes find a home. God protected and blessed them in all of it and they never lost a man.

Vs. 18-20 In Moses' explanation of his leadership, he was showing that he commanded these tribes to fight for Israel in the land. We know the story in Numbers and these tribes sought God and permission to claim those lands and they were more than willing to fight to win the inheritance for the other tribes. This was a very positive thing and a sign of God's blessing.

Vs. 21-22 This was Moses' encouragement of Joshua.

Vs. 23-29 Because of all the blessing, Moses must have been encouraged in himself to ask God to let him go into the land. Verse 26 seems pretty strong, but it shows that God and Moses were close.

V. 28 Notice that God gave Moses an assignment. I don't think Moses would have stood around sulking, but this task would be very important and it would take Moses out of his own situation.

V. 29 Now we're back to "real time." If you know the song, "Sweet Hour of Prayer," you know the phrase from that third verse that nobody sings, "till from Mt. Pisgah's lofty height I view my home and take my flight." That's a cool verse.

For us in the harvest, God allows us to set goals, but our only sure goal is to follow Christ. God is the one who determines what fruit we bear, when we are to live and when we are to be "graduated." A disciple stays healthy by remembering that a disciple always follows. The commission and the harvest belong to the Lord.

### **Luke 6:12-38**

Vs. 12-16 It would be great to put all of the Gospels together to get the full view of this. What follows is the Sermon on the Mount. Luke is the only one who tells us that the night before Jesus chose the Twelve and then gave the sermon, He had spent all night alone praying on the mountain. Mark says why He chose them in a very cool way. (Mark 3:14) It was immediately after selecting the Twelve that Jesus came down with them, saw the crowd and was moved by the Father to give the disciples their orientation to discipleship. We call that orientation talk the Sermon on the Mount.

Vs. 17-19 These verses give the idea that Jesus might not have planned to give this sermon here at this time. But when the crowds came to Him and He healed them, I'll bet He was moved with compassion for them and sensed from the Spirit that this was a good time and place to teach the disciples and His newly chosen apostles.

Vs. 20-26 Notice here that Jesus lifts His eyes on His disciples. This is how we know that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is really Jesus' orientation to His disciples. I guess that means to us too.

In reading Luke's version of this sermon, it is good to keep in mind that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience and Luke was writing to Gentiles. Luke left out material about the law that Matthew included. Also, it is good to remember that Jesus repeated His sermons and stories everywhere He went. The slight difference in wording is probably due to Jesus saying things in a slightly different way on different occasions.

Notice in the *blesseds* and *woes* that the word *now* is used. This means that Jesus was suggesting that some disciples, for the sake of the kingdom and the harvest, would choose to deny themselves for this time on earth, so they could devote themselves to following the Lord in the harvest.

Vs. 27-36 What Jesus told His disciples only makes sense if a person is totally devoted to Christ, having no earthly treasure, working fully in the harvest. If we have been saved and understand what is happening on this planet, that should make us capable of living like this.

Vs. 37-38 A disciple is to offer Christ's gift in the harvest, not be a judge on earth. He is to give freely since he has received freely. All of discipleship and making disciples flows out of understanding the love and grace we have been shown in Christ.

### **Psalm 67**

Just like with Psalm 66, this could have been written by Israel as it entered the land, but the declaration to all nations is truer to the way David praised God. I think this is David not just celebrating how God saved him, but I think David understood his place in God's plan and was celebrating the fulfilling of the promise to Abraham.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that this is the blessing that God gave to Aaron to pronounce upon Israel, but it is said here as a request so that God will be known in all the earth. This entire psalm is a testimony to the nations. Israel's destiny was to bring the saving knowledge of God to the entire world.

Vs. 3-5 The word *let* makes this block of verses stand out. This is to be the response of *the nations* to what they see in the grace of God's blessing on Israel. This will be true in the Millennial Kingdom. Verse 5 is quoted by Paul in Romans 15. The witness to the nations was what Israel was all about as a continuation of the promise to Adam and Eve and the promise to Abraham. All of God's working has always been focused on the redemption of mankind.

Vs. 6-7 Again, this will be true of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom when all the nations come to Jerusalem to meet their king.

### **Proverbs 11:27**

There is a kind of justice in the Bible where God gives a person what they want, or here, what they seek. It is not always good to succeed, and just because the Lord lets you have something, doesn't mean it was His will, or that it's good for you. Those who seek God's glory will know His favor, even in death or hardship. Those who seek evil or their own gain may get more than they bargained for. Or as Jesus said, *What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* (Mark 8:36)

### **MARCH 25**

By now you've worked off your McReuben and Shamrock Shake. Set your sights on April 1, no joke, and work to stay caught up. Deuteronomy is fantastic reading, but there isn't a lot of action. There will be more action in Joshua and then we'll roll for several months reading about one person after another. That will be more interesting for you. By May 1 everything will go faster. We'll be in Judges and in the Gospel of John. For now, if need be, forget about these Reading Notes and just keep up in The One Year Bible. If you get behind, put the Bible somewhere where it is visible, like on a kitchen counter, and when you pass by it, sit down, read a page, mark the page as read, and jump back into what you were doing. The discipline you develop will stay with you all your life. You'll feel good about yourself, because you are gaining God's Word and heart, and He'll notice you are doing this for Him. Today we know Him here as we follow Him in the harvest; tomorrow we will be with Him forever.

### **Deuteronomy 4**

These chapters in Deuteronomy are like sitting down to an amazing feast, where everything you'd want is there, but there's too much. Or it's like having a late-night conversation with someone you haven't seen in years who you really respect, and everything they're saying is good and confirms and strengthens your heart, but you know in the morning you won't remember it all. This book, these chapters, is like a deep well that any disciple will want to come back to repeatedly to drink from. So, mark up your Bible and highlight everything that speaks to you, that you think is important for you, for us, as disciples following Christ in the harvest. Next year, and the next and the next, when you read this again in The One Year Bible, you'll find more each time.

Vs. 1-4 This is like the prologue to Moses giving the new generation instructions. This long "talk," probably given over a week, will be Moses' final words. Although v. 44 says *law*, the word is really "instruction." Moses is advising the people, from his love for Yahweh and his love for them, to follow the Lord.

V. 2 Notice that the Pharisees, like all of us, were guilty of both of these. They added traditions to the law, as if to enforce what can only come from a heart of faith. Then, they lightened the law to create loopholes for the sins they liked, like divorcing a wife for any reason.

Notice the contrast in vs. 3 and 4. Listening to Moses and following God was illustrated in what happened at Baal-peor. Those who sinned died and those *who held fast to the Lord* lived.

Vs. 5-8 Israel was to have been a very simple country with their entire routine ordered around their feasts. The nations would have thought they were nuts, leaving their homes and fields for these celebrations, always taking one day off of work per week. Nuts. But as they obeyed the Lord, all nations were to have seen that something else was at work. God's blessing of Israel's love and faith would have won nations and people to the Lord. That was the plan.

Vs. 9-14 I think the primary thought here was that the people were to fear the Lord. All of these people, if born at that time, had seen the Lord descend on Mt. Sinai. God wanted to instill a respect and awe. Not only that, they had seen what happened to the generation that rebelled against the Lord and how it caused the entire nation to wander for 38 years. God was to be respected, held in awe and feared. Then, out of love for their kids and concern for the future of the nation, they were to teach their children.

Vs. 15-19 Notice again that this begins with a caution. Moses really loved these people. I never noticed the connection of the people hearing God but not seeing Him, and how that related to not making an image.

V. 19 And they were warned not to worship any of the heavenly bodies. When you read the days of creation you notice that the sun, stars, etc., were made on the fourth day. In an interesting way, that made them secondary and unnecessary, not only because God made them, but because there already was light and vegetation on the earth. They were made only to serve mankind, not to be worshiped by mankind.

Vs. 20-24 God was their Savior and their Lord who visibly led them to freedom and salvation.

Vs. 21-22 Yet even as great as Moses was, his own disobedience to the Word of God brought God's punishment. How much more should the people be alert to obeying God and not making Him angry?

Vs. 23-24 Another warning. It is fair to say here that Moses was saying they were not to treat God like a "religion." They were in relationship with a living, listening, and seeing Lord and Savior.

Vs. 25-31 What an amazing portion of Scripture. This is prophetic to the point of telling of the Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 25-26 Moses was a wise steward over God's house. He knew these people. This generation was "charged up" on the fear of God, but if they failed to teach the next generation, they would stray from God.

Vs. 27-29 This happened, officially, after the devastating rule of King Manasseh. Israel was exiled for 70 years, one year for every Sabbatical year they missed. The book of Daniel accounts for the entire time of the exile. If you want to see an example of v. 29, read Daniel, chapter 9. This promise has been available to every generation of Israel. The last scattering of Israel happened to the generation that rejected the Christ.

V. 30 Israel will pray this prayer earnestly when they see the day of the Son of Man, the Tribulation, begin. Then there will be a national turning of Israel to God. For those seven years of Tribulation and for the thousand years of the Millennial Kingdom, Israel will be a testimony and witness to the nations of the glory of God.

V. 31 This is the promise to Abraham and the hope of Israel. Israel may fail to obey the covenant they made at Sinai, but God will never forget the covenant He made with Abraham. Notice what both Mary and Zechariah say in Luke 1:50-80. Both of them mention God's promised mercy to Israel. That mercy has always been there, and it will "kick in" with full power when Israel turns to God in the future and begs for their Messiah's return.

Vs. 32-40 Again, this section is a powerful plea from Moses and God Himself for the people to take to heart what has been done for them. What deep love and faithfulness God had shown them.

V. 40 This command is based on the living proof of God's love and salvation.

For us as disciples, our response to God is and always has to be from His love and His salvation. God does call us to hardship and to sacrifice in the harvest, but Jesus walked there before He ever called us. What He paid will always outweigh anything we ever do in this life. We will always be the unworthy servants who, when we have done all that is commanded us, say, "we have only done what was our duty." But we obey and do this because we are, and always will be, overwhelmed by the super abundance of His grace, love and mercy.

Notice the reference to Israel being given the land *for all time*. This will explain the next few verses.

Vs. 41-43 This might seem out of place. Suddenly there is another subject. Moses has been talking about them polluting the land through idolatry, but there is another way for them to pollute the land, through murder and bloodshed. The next great curse on creation, after Adam and Eve rebelled against God, was that Cain killed Abel and "hid" his blood in the earth. God cursed the ground. When Israel is finally exiled out of the land, which has just been spoken about, it is because of how King Manasseh filled the land with innocent blood.

*Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Kings 21:16)*

*and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon. (2 Kings 24:4)*

You don't really have to wonder what God thinks about the killing of innocent children for the sake of our sexual freedom and convenience. The Canaanites sacrificed the children born through Baal worship to Moloch. For all of this, after hundreds of years of patience, God finally judged them through Israel saying that the land vomited them out. If God is silent, God's silence is scary. There is grace and there is patience, but His patience is His kindness trying to lead us to repentance. When we reject His kindness, only judgment is left.

*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)*

As a friend of mine said, "God doesn't always pay on Friday." The Bible, from one end to the other, says that "pay day" is coming.

The cities of refuge were a provision to make sure the innocent were protected, so that the land wouldn't be polluted through the shedding of innocent blood.

Vs. 44-49 What we have read is the reason Moses needed to give the coming instructions and motivation to follow the Lord. Now we are told where this all took place. Tomorrow we will begin reading Moses' great sermon to Israel.

### **Luke 6:39-7:10**

Luke 6:39-49

Jesus finishes up His "disciple orientation." Think of what you just read in Deuteronomy. Moses will keep telling Israel to heed God's words. Jesus is telling His disciples to heed His words. How interesting. The instructions Jesus is giving the disciples here will be repeated again in Luke. I wonder how often Jesus repeated these things to His disciples in different situations over the next two years.

When you read these same things in Matthew, chapters 5-7, it is a bit easier to see the logical connections between one thing and another. The order was very logical and necessary for the disciples.

Vs. 39-42 Jesus had just told the disciples that to follow Him in the harvest they needed to have a perspective of life on earth, working in the harvest, which was very supernatural. If they didn't have that, they would be horrible makers of disciples, like blind men leading blind men.

V. 40 They had to become total disciples of Jesus to be like Him. Their disciples in the future would reflect their same level of discipleship. That could be good, or bad.

Vs. 41-42 This is a warning to them, and to us. The disciple maker and the disciple are in view here. For the next two years, Jesus would be helping them to examine their own eyes.

Vs. 43-45 Just as the "eye" stood for perception and honesty of heart in the last illustration, the fruit is an illustration for the content of the heart. Disciples of Jesus are not primarily people of skill or ability, but they are deep lovers of Jesus. It all flows from a heart in love with Christ.

Vs. 46-49 And having said all of that about heart, love is seen in obedience. To have a feeling of love is not the same as following. What are His commandments? Most of the commandments I see from Jesus involve following and bearing a cross in the harvest, acknowledging His name before men. That is a love and a life that can withstand this planet and its sickness.

Luke 7:1-10

This was probably the first big lesson for the Twelve. Here was a Gentile who actually had the kind of faith in Jesus that recognized Him as one with authority, a Lord. If you are a master, you say it and it is done. This Roman soldier knew Jesus was a ruler. As in the parable above, not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" recognizes Him as Lord. The proof is in the doing.

V. 9 You don't see Jesus marveling over faith very often.

### **Psalm 68:1-18**

David must have been having a good day. This seems to have been written after David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, fulfilling David's dream to dwell in the presence of the Lord in Zion.

Vs. 1-3 We haven't read about David's life yet, but this is a very joyous summary of his suffering and that God had saved and vindicated David.

Vs. 4-6 This praise is to come from the oppressed and those in need of mercy and comfort. That was David for many years. God is a gentle protector.

Vs. 7-10 All the years before God established David in Zion, Israel lived as a prey of the nations. David is describing God bringing physical blessing and peace to Israel.

Vs. 11-14 This is some celebration among the people of the victories the Lord gave. Apparently the Hebrew is hard to understand, but later, we'll see that when Saul and David returned from battles, the women lined the roads and sang.

Vs. 15-18 This is a poetic expression of the greatness of Mt. Zion, Jerusalem, because the Lord chose it as His abode. All the other mountains were envious.

V. 18 Notice that Paul quotes this in Ephesians 4. Yahweh is seen here coming up the mountain into the city in victory, leading the captives. Here, the victor receives gifts and in Ephesians 4, having received the spoils of victory, He gives gifts to men. (See also, Isaiah 53:12.)

### **Proverbs 11:28**

The thing is, society exalts the prominence of the rich, but you don't notice the leaves of trees.

I was reading this morning where Jesus told the disciples that it would be almost impossible for those with riches to enter the Kingdom of God. The disciples seem to have understood this and were shocked that to have possessions could actually block you from saving faith. But it seems that the issue is really who, or what, is ruling our hearts. If riches are our trust and our comfort and our hope, they are an idol, a god. If a person has that kind of god, it is hard to go to the real God who says, *blessed are the poor and go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.* (Matthew 19:21)

## MARCH 26

### Deuteronomy 5-6

This is another treat today. As I read each paragraph, everything rings so true and seems to apply to me walking in this dying world. These people were not saved by obeying the law, but they were saved, like Abraham, in the promise of God to Abraham. With faith in that promise, their eyes would have been opened and their hearts aflame with the love of God. As you and I read this with our faith in Christ, our hearts automatically connect to the grace of God and the wonder of His love for us. It is interesting to me that in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham tells the rich man about sending Lazarus from the dead to his brothers, *If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.* (Luke 16:31) If a person was not moved to God, in love and gratefulness, by what we read today, neither would a miracle have convinced them.

#### Deuteronomy 5

As you read all of this find some words to mark. We already mentioned, *the Lord your God*. If nothing else stands out or captures your interest, look for the word *possess*.

Vs. 1-5 This generation might have thought that the covenant back 40 years ago at Mt. Sinai was with their fathers, but God doesn't make covenants with dead people. Many of these people were children back then, but more importantly they are the ones who are alive now and who have been educated, nurtured and preserved by God to enjoy the promise to Abraham. Moses reminds the people of the miraculous awe of that day. For those who had been there, I'll bet they still remembered it vividly and visually.

As a disciple, what do you remember about the time and events shortly before you came to Christ?

Vs. 6-15 The first four of the Ten Commandments have to do with the relationship with God. Notice that this section begins (v. 6) and ends (v. 15) with their deliverance from Egypt and God as their Savior. All of the motivation for loving and obeying God was built on His love for them. How could they have another god? How could they make an image, since God only revealed Himself in power and with His voice? How could they use His name in a worthless manner? How could they resist taking a day of rest to remember His love and deliverance and to remember that He sustained and provided for them?

As disciples, the importance of our honest, heartfelt gratitude for our salvation cannot be overstated. In Luke 7:47 Jesus said, "He who is forgiven little, loves little." That is totally based on our perception of our need and the value of what Jesus did for us. Our understanding of this will determine how much we love Jesus back and how we labor in the harvest.

Vs. 16-21 All of these commandments are related to our neighbor, but without the relationship to God, they are just humanitarian. Notice that the love of God flows into the honor of their parents, which in turn has a connection to how long the people would remain in the land.

V. 21 The opposite of this was abiding in God and contentment with His care and provision. That is the same for us today.

Vs. 22-27 These words and this event were permanently "burned" into their minds. The event showed the glory and power of God without presenting an image of Him. This was like nothing that had ever happened on earth. It happened to them as the children of Abraham. It wasn't just a scary event. It was an amazing privilege.

Again, think back on the privilege of what happened to you around the time you trusted Christ as Savior.

Vs. 28-31 The effect of that event was expressed by God in v. 29. Amazingly, that entire event didn't help the fathers of these people, but it did help these people. This generation standing here was probably the godliest generation of Israel. Moses' ministry at that time and during the 40 years was to teach the people.

Vs. 32-33 Now Moses will teach the people one final time. He urges them to be careful to obey. God wanted Israel to possess the land and not lose it. Everything said here was out of love for their blessing and success.

What a great chapter. When I read v. 33, it makes me think that in God's work to redeem mankind, nothing has changed. In our lives following Christ, God still wants us to be blessed and bearing fruit for Him. Look again at yesterday's reading in Luke 6:46. We hear and follow, even today, because we are captivated by His love and salvation.

## Deuteronomy 6

This chapter is full of good stuff. Take your time and look for repetition and recurring themes. As a disciple, write down every principle you think is important for you, your church, or that "other guy."

Vs. 1-3 Look at the purposes for what Moses is about to say to them. Notice the importance of teaching their children. Notice the importance of hearing God and being careful.

Vs. 4-9 Verses 4-6 are called the Shema of Israel. Shema means to hear. Notice the importance of love. This love is based on their gratitude for their own salvation. That is just like us.

V. 6 This is to bear weight upon their hearts because of God's work for them and the importance of these words.

V. 7 Always, everywhere and forever, parents were supposed to be talking to their children about God.

Vs. 8-9 This is symbolic, not literal. God's Word was to control all their actions (the hand) and everything they thought (the forehead). God's Word was also to control their private lives (the house) and their public lives (the gates). God never meant that they were to fulfill this command literally by tying verse boxes to their hands and foreheads as you see orthodox Jews doing with phylacteries.

Vs. 10-15 God was going to give them the land as a gift because of the promise. They didn't earn it or deserve it. Faith in the promise to Abraham would save them.

Vs. 12-13 Here again is the importance of remembering their salvation.

Vs. 14-15 How could they serve other gods? But they will and God will punish them.

Vs. 16-19 Jesus quotes this in His confrontation with Satan in the wilderness. Here, to test God was to not obey and to treat the commandments as sort of binding. They were to follow God and thrust the people out of the land. Instead, the next generation will begin making treaties with the people.

Vs. 20-25 Telling the story of their deliverance and salvation was to have guided their teaching of their children. This wouldn't have been academic if each person were genuinely in love with

God and grateful for their salvation. This was all to be driven by love. Because of this love, obeying the commands of a loving God would have been easier to understand and to follow. The failure to come was first in the hearts of the parents, and then the parents got so involved with living that they forgot to share the message, with a heart of love, with their children.

Notice that this chapter almost ends the same as the last chapter.

As you read chapter 6, maybe you feel, as I do, that this is as true for us as it was for the people of Israel. A failure to love God for our salvation and a failure to communicate this to our children makes everything we do today a short-term gain, or not a gain at all. The basic core of making disciples begins at home. And as Jesus said, a disciple is not above his teacher. If the parents are fully in love and grateful and devoted to following Christ in the harvest, so will the little disciples be. Tragically, both in Israel then and in the church today, this is not the case.

### **Luke 7:11-35**

Vs. 11-17 This event is only in Luke. There are a couple things that I get from this story. First, Jesus was led by the Spirit just like we are. Jesus didn't know He would find this going on, but as He saw it, moved with compassion, He knew what the Father wanted Him to do.

I wonder when the guy sat up alive if he just continued where he had left off and said, "And like I was saying..."

This event apparently was one of the things that caused John the Baptist to doubt. Jesus was leading the life of the Messiah who was freeing captives of sin, not captives of government. John had been sitting in prison under a tyrant a long time and was losing perspective.

Vs. 18-23 Matthew also has this encounter. Jesus' answer to John was to focus on how Jesus fulfilled all the Scripture concerning the Messiah, rather than concentrating on his own circumstances. The works that the Father had given Jesus to do confirmed that Jesus was sent from the Father. John the Baptist would have understood the Scripture and the origin of the signs.

Vs. 24-28 Jesus was trying to get the crowd to think about their fascination with John. They went *into the wilderness* because his message was authoritative, not political. They went because his lifestyle was hard and illustrated the urgency of the times and his message. He wasn't just a prophet, but he fulfilled Scripture as the forerunner of the Messiah. John was the conclusion of the law and the prophets. He was the greatest man born of that entire period. Think of the people who lived then, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Job, etc. Although John's ministry was short, his task and privilege made him the greatest of that entire era on earth.

But as the new covenant is infinitely better than the old covenant, the followers of Christ have an even greater privilege.

Vs. 29-30 Apparently, as Jesus expressed this, there was an emotional response, sort of a stirring of heart at the truth Jesus just revealed. The people and tax collectors were awed that they had actually participated in a big event by submitting to John's baptism. The Pharisees and scribes (lawyers) just hardened their hearts.

Vs. 31-32 Jesus is actually rebuking that entire generation of people for the childish way they treated this great, historical, redemptive event. They had wanted John and Jesus to conform to them and criticized both.

Vs. 33-35 Though John and Jesus were opposites in appearance and habit, they both confirmed the wisdom and deeds of God.

Not a big point, but in Matthew it says John came neither eating nor drinking. Here, maybe for the sake of accuracy and because of legalistic Jewish Christians who followed Paul "correcting"

his teaching and who taught the Gentiles abstinence, Luke says that John ate no bread and drank no wine. It is clear in this context that Jesus drank wine. Jesus was the opposite of John in these details. He not only ate rich food, but He also drank wine. The word for drunkard is "wine drinker." This would have been a rebuttal to legalistic teachers telling the Gentiles that they needed more abstinence in their faith. Paul warned Timothy about such teachers, *who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* (1 Tim. 4:3)

### **Psalm 68:19-35**

I suppose it is hard for us to embrace the sense of God's victory over oppression unless we are oppressed. It is hard to rejoice in His victory over enemies unless we have lost family and friends to these enemies. In the western world we are insulated, for the most part, and so we read this from David as primal raving from a primitive, uncultured age. The same God who tells us to love our enemies inspired this in David.

Vs. 19-20 Just like in Deuteronomy, God is a God of salvation. That is the basis of our love, our obedience and our sacrifice for Him.

Vs. 21-23 God will bring justice, vengeance and vindication. This almost has a sense of the final battle at the end of the Tribulation.

Vs. 24-27 The procession of God's people coming from the south (Ben and Judah) and from the north (Zeb and Naphtali) are coming to God in the joy of victory.

Vs. 28-31 The nations (in the Millennium) will come before God in submission.

Vs. 32-35 Every knee will bow and God will receive the praise of all nations and all men.

In light of the unrest in the Middle East in recent years, it is interesting to read here, and elsewhere, that Egypt will come to God and will know Christ.

### **Proverbs 11:29-31**

Good words for *the wise of heart*. Think of these verses in terms of what we just read in Deuteronomy. Those who loved God for their salvation would make this the atmosphere of their homes and families, and that in turn would save and preserve the nation.

## **MARCH 27**

### **Deuteronomy 7-8**

#### Deuteronomy 7

Vs. 1-5 In reading this section you might want to review the post for March 20 where we addressed the issue of God ordering the death of the Midianites in Numbers 31. Hundreds of years of mercy had been shown these people. Men like Abraham and Melchizedek had been witnesses among them, yet their cultures became incurable cesspools of idolatry and sexual perversion. For those who didn't relocate, God was calling all who stayed in their towns into His presence. The innocent (children below the age of accountability) would go into a place of comfort, but those who had been idolaters and not responded to God's messengers, would be put into punishment. Remember what Abraham said to the Lord in Genesis 18:25, "*Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*"

Vs. 3-4 Note that God speaks of the inhabitants of the land as if they were a danger to Israel, danger by spiritual / cultural infection. This is the same thing that the Spirit tells us, not to be conformed to this world. It would be like asking what the acceptable level of growing cancer

should be in your body. Yet all of us are far more tolerant of sin and hindrances than we should be.

Vs. 6-11 Notice how often love is mentioned in these verses. Anyone who says that you don't find love in the Bible until you get to Jesus in the New Testament has never read the Bible. Even though these verses are written to Israel, there is something in every disciple that should respond to these words.

Vs. 12-16 In the last section and here, there are some interesting things going on. The relationship with God, like any relationship, needs trust and maintenance. In all times in history, for all people, obeying God meant pleasing Him and receiving His blessing. Disobeying God meant displeasing Him and, at some point, receiving punishment. In the last section it mentioned that God was blessing Israel because of the promises made to their fathers. The promise to Abraham was unconditional and will be fulfilled completely in the future by Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. The blessings being promised here are very conditional. They are a part of the Mosaic covenant, the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. This covenant, the Old Testament, is built on obedience to the law. According to Romans 7, the law was given to reveal the sin that is a part of our nature. The law couldn't get rid of sin and it couldn't save. So, this covenant with Moses under the law has nothing to do with salvation. Salvation was always through faith in the promise to Abraham. But obedience to the law from a heart of faith would bring blessing of such a nature that it would become a testimony to the world. Any outside nation, witnessing the blessings described here, would want to come to Israel and "drink from their well," and receive the same blessings.

Vs. 17-26 Here again, there is a mixture of the promise to Abraham and the covenant under Moses. God would drive the nations out before Israel just as God humbled Pharaoh in Egypt. This was based on His promise to Abraham. Faith in that promise would enable Israel to boldly worship God only according to the Mosaic covenant. They would also know, because of their faith in the promise to Abraham, that God was doing this and that the idols of these nations were trash to be destroyed. Israel would also have patience to obey and allow God to slowly give them the land, knowing that God would certainly fulfill His promise to Abraham.

#### Deuteronomy 8

If you need something to underline, look for *Lord your God*. Literally this is "Yahweh Elohim," Elohim being in the possessive; that is, "your Elohim." Elohim means the mighty, all powerful one. Yahweh is the ever living One, who faithfully loves and keeps covenant with His people. What a combination. It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father, who art in heaven*. Eternal love and power are combined in one person who cares for us.

Vs. 1-5 Notice in v. 1, that the commandment is to be obeyed in view of God's grace in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Faith would empower them to obey.

God educated and disciplined the people out of grace and love. Not only did God care for them, but in v. 3 He humbled them with need and let them hunger so that they would see that He could take care of them. You may have noticed that v. 3 was quoted by Jesus in His temptation.

According to what God has said in the New Testament, this is also how He disciplines and prunes us.

Vs. 6-10 In obeying the commandments, God would lavish His blessing on them and in turn they would praise Him.

Vs. 11-20 Notice how this warning is mixed with God's reminder to them of their deliverance and salvation. God also reminds them that He is the One who fed and sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness.

V. 16 Notice again the reference to the *manna*. He used their hunger and need, and the supernatural provision of this food to humble them. This, too, is why God allows us to "hunger." He needs to humble us and show us His power and provision.

I guess what speaks to me in all of this is that the glow and joy of our salvation in Christ needs to be present in all we do and all we are. We live only because of Him. How can we ignore Him or not follow Him into the harvest? How can we not surrender everything and take up our cross? How can we withhold the love and grace we have received and not tell it and share it with those who are lost?

Why did God choose us to become followers of Christ? Love. If you witness to people, you understand the miracle of someone who will listen and open their heart. Why? Because they're smart or sensitive or good? No. Somewhere in there, I believe there is a molecule of will, so small as to be nearly inconsequential. The rest is pure grace; God choosing the foolish and the weak and low and despised to save and make followers of Christ in the harvest. Given this privilege and calling, we need to keep our love for Christ alive by treasuring our salvation, as we follow Him in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples.

### **Luke 7:36-8:3**

One of the things we see in the Gospels is that Jesus was very sensitive to accepting and responding to the things the Father and Spirit put into His path. For us disciples, Jesus becomes the model of being a disciple, walking in the Spirit and abiding in God. One thing I constantly wonder about is that Jesus accepted so many invitations from Pharisees to dine with them. Holy heartburn! Every one of them became a conflict, and a divine opportunity to present people with the truth of God and the person of the Messiah.

Luke 7:36-50

Vs. 36-39 Pharisees, I'm told, often gave dinners and people were invited to stand against the walls and listen in to the conversations. It seems that this woman might have already heard Jesus' teaching and was moved by it. The ointment suggests that she was a well-to-do sinner. This may have some connection to Luke 8:1-3.

V. 38 This definitely would have been scandalous for a rabbi to let a known prostitute do something like this to him.

Vs. 40-43 Either Simon's body language gave him away, or probably the Spirit revealed his thoughts to Jesus. Both of these debts were big. Fifty days' wages would be nothing to sniff at. 500 days' wages would be enormous.

Vs. 44-48 This comparison and contrast is all based on their perception of Jesus. Simon invited Jesus out of a feigned respect for Him. In fact, in terms of acts done, there was no respect shown to Jesus at all. Notice that Jesus acknowledges Simon's view of the woman, but in an ironic way. Her sins, *which were many*, were forgiven. The sinful woman, having heard Jesus and having understood God's forgiveness, lavished Him with respect and honor. When Jesus pronounced her forgiven, it was in response to her love that illustrated her faith.

Vs. 49-50 Again, the Jews (leaders) questioned Jesus' right to say this. Jesus ignored them and stated the reality of the case. Her faith had saved her. The result of her faith and salvation was to show Him love, respect and honor.

Just like in Deuteronomy, we are faced with the response of love again. Love doesn't save us, but it does and should issue from our faith and the reality of what we have been saved from. We love because He first loved us. The question for each of us is, were we really, really, really lost, or sort of on the border? This event and what it teaches cuts right to our hearts too. Those who follow in the harvest passionately are those who realize the miracle of their own salvation. They

realize they were desperate, with no way to pay. They were lost, separated and hopeless. They love much and because of this love they follow their Savior in His mission, seeking the lost, working with the other redeemed, making disciples, who make disciples.

What does the Lord say to you in this story?

Luke 8:1-3

The connection between the story above and these verses is pretty clear. This woman may have been one of those who followed Jesus. It is actually suggested that the woman with the ointment may have been Mary Magdalene. It doesn't say it is. The woman who anointed Jesus' feet was a sinner, but it doesn't say she had been demon possessed. Although, obviously, He might have already cured her, and then, you wonder why Simon wouldn't have had a bigger fit if she had had demons. Who knows?

What we do know is that another Mary, the rich one who lived with Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, heard this story; and, just before Jesus was crucified, humbled herself and did the same thing for Him that this "sinful" woman did. (John 12)

At the end of this passage it mentions other women who became disciples. Why did they follow Jesus? Why do you follow Jesus? It wasn't just because He healed them. They followed out of love for the One who set them free.

### **Psalm 69:1-18**

Today we just have the first half of Psalm 69. As you begin reading it, understand that this psalm is quoted often in the New Testament. The Spirit designed David's experience to mirror what Jesus would someday feel. It is pretty interesting that God can do that with us and our lives, to be an encouragement or lesson or model for others. And it's funny that He doesn't ask us first. He just does it. And since we know He loves us, and we love Him and know that we would have been dead without Him, we rejoice in His use of our lives, knowing that, *in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.* (Rom. 8:28, RSV) Read this psalm in terms of Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Vs. 1-3 Imagine, both David and Jesus felt this.

Vs. 4-5 Jesus quotes v. 4 in John 15:25. I'm sure v. 5 didn't apply to Jesus. David's accusers lied about him to make the people believe that King Saul's desire to kill David was justified. The Jewish leaders did the same to justify their killing of Jesus.

Vs. 6-8 Somehow I feel these verses. David was followed by men and their families who now shared the same reproach that David did. They were wanted men. Think of this too in terms of those who followed Jesus.

David had been anointed by God and told he would be king as a young teen. He was simply honoring God. Saul's jealousy wasn't David's fault. In the same way, Jesus' honoring of His Father became His reproach among the Jews.

V. 8 *For not even his brothers believed in him.* (John 7:5)

Vs. 9-12 *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."* (John 2:17) Isn't it interesting that David had a deep desire and zeal for seeking God at the tabernacle and that David was the guy who wanted to build Yahweh a temple in Jerusalem. So much of what we read in The Psalms shows David's desire to live in God's presence and be hidden in His sanctuary. David was zealous for God's house and was accordingly called an idiot by everyone who didn't share his view of God. I imagine that in Jesus' day, there were those who told "Jesus jokes" and that there were a couple bar-room songs dedicated to Him.

Vs. 13-18 This certainly was David's daily prayer as He ran from Saul for possibly a decade. This may also have been Jesus' prayer or feelings during His trials from His enemies. It may very well have been what Jesus felt on the cross.

More tomorrow.

By the way, just like Israel will be honored for God using them as an illustration to mankind, David will also receive great future rewards for God using him to teach us waiting, praying and the suffering of our Lord. In the days to come, both Israel and David will be humbled that God used them like this for the salvation of mankind.

### **Proverbs 12:1**

There's that "L" word again. When you look at Psalm 69 and understand this is God's idea of discipline or "pruning," I'm not so sure any of us would willingly enroll in that course. However, when we first learn to love God through our Lord and His love, this isn't something that scares us because we know Him. This kind of discipline is what Romans 5:1-8 is all about.

## **MARCH 28**

### **Deuteronomy 9-10**

This morning I read Romans 11:25, *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* Apparently, the response of the Gentile Christians to the grace they had received was pride and arrogance. Paul needed to remind them that they were no better than the Jews. God had simply shown them love and grace. Here in Deuteronomy, Moses and God didn't want Israel to forget who they were either. What was about to happen to them was all grace that they didn't deserve. That's good for us to remember as we follow in the harvest. This isn't about our morality or who knows more about God. Knowledge puffs up. Love builds up.

#### Deuteronomy 9

Vs. 1-3 Moses mentions that there were fortified cities, great armies and huge men (targets) to fight. These were the things that the ten spies had said to discourage the people and make them bitter. But this generation had already seen that it would be God who would fight for them. It's hard to fight *a consuming fire*.

Vs. 4-5 The reason God would thrust these people out was because of their wickedness and because of the promise to Abraham. It had nothing to do with the righteousness of Israel. Moses will now tell a little story.

Vs. 6-29 In fact, Israel was a very stubborn and rebellious people. The generation standing there listening to Moses wouldn't be rebellious, but they had the benefit of living through the results of their parents' sins over the past 40 years, living in the camp of death. These words would fall on fertile soil. That wouldn't be the case in the next generations.

Vs. 6-12 This should have been a great moment for the nation. Moses was on the mountain confirming the covenant. God, Himself, the Creator of the universe, was actually writing on the stones Himself. No other nation in the history of the world had ever experienced this. That is the point here, I think.

Vs. 13-21 Yet, at that very moment during their greatest privilege and God's revelation, the people had already broken the covenant and put themselves in mortal danger before God. Moses is trying to make them see the irrationality of what they did by making that calf. These people might have looked to Kadesh-barnea as the best example of their rebellion, but God and Moses led them back to the first and most irrational act they committed. This sin was still a part of them, and it has been a part of every heart, including ours, since Adam and Eve.

V. 17 That covenant was broken, illustrated with Moses smashing the tablets. God would reestablish the covenant with them.

V. 18 This is the first time I've noticed that the reason Moses went without food for those 40 days was out of deep concern for the people.

V. 19 Moses had to plead for their lives.

V. 20 This is the first time we have heard that God was ready to take out Aaron.

V. 21 Their sin had been so vile, they couldn't even reuse the gold of the calf. Moses made them drink it, which also was ironic since God, not the calf, had given them the water.

Vs. 22-24 Now, Moses parenthetically relates the sin with the calf to the sin at Kadesh-barnea.

Vs. 25-29 Back to the calf. Moses went up on the mountain again to beg for God's mercy for Israel. Notice that the basis for God's mercy was the covenant with Abraham. This would have shown the people that they needed to put their faith in what Abraham had put his faith in. They would break the Mosaic Covenant but their hope was in the grace of God as seen in the promise to Abraham.

#### Deuteronomy 10

Vs. 1-5 On the basis of Moses' pleading, God's mercy and His remembrance of His promise to Abraham, God allowed new tablets to be cut and the covenant was reestablished. Verse 5 is a summary since the ark hadn't been built yet.

Vs. 6-9 This seems to be parenthetical, showing that even Aaron's death and the selection of the Levites to guard the tabernacle were a result of the sinfulness and rebellion of the people.

Vs. 10-11 It was when Moses came down off the mountain (and the tabernacle was built and the people were numbered and put in order) that God commanded Moses to lead the people into Canaan. You would think that after that fiasco with the calf, the people would have been obedient. This generation knew exactly what happened at Kadesh-barnea and had been suffering under it for the past 38 years.

I think the people got the idea. They had not been an easy people to lead. So much of what is written here testifies to the honesty and accuracy of this reporting. No great nation would ever air their dirty laundry like Israel is doing here. This isn't a testimony to them as a great people. It is a testimony to the love and forgiveness of their God.

Vs. 12-22 What things stand out to you in this section? I don't know about you, but this stirs my heart. What does God seek? At the top of His list is love. Love is a relationship. Even in marriage this is the key. You can break love down into actions or responsibilities like communication, faithfulness and service to one another; but these only help us try to grasp what love really is. What God really gives to us and wants from us is love. There are many religions and misrepresentations of "god" on earth, but none of them come close to the reality being expressed here. God is deeply clear and straightforward about wanting a relationship with us that is first and foremost a bond of love. This is the consistent message of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

#### **Luke 8:4-21**

It is interesting that Jesus began to tell these parables after He was very popular. The Pharisees and scribes were beginning to explain His power by saying it was from Beelzebub, and His family thought He was out of His mind. This parable would have been a challenge to the people and it would have been instructive to the disciples, letting them know that there would be four kinds of people who would hear their messages too.

Vs. 4-8 This was said for the crowds and there were probably some people who got it.

Vs. 9-10 This is the blindness of the nation that was predicted in Isaiah 6:9. Oddly enough, Paul quotes this in Romans 11:8 and follows it by quoting Psalm 69:22, which is in our reading for today. You only get this by reading The One Year Bible.

The parables were meant to show who was seeking God and who really didn't care.

Vs. 11-15 Note that the real focal point of the parable and need for bearing fruit is expressed in what Satan seeks to prevent in v. 12: *believe and be saved*. People differ on their interpretations of the seed in the shallow ground and seed in the thorns. I have met professing believers in both soils. Who knows? The goal of the Word is not only faith, belief and salvation, but fruit that bears more fruit, or as we would say, disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 16-18 These verses, for me, show that bearing fruit has something to do with declaring the truth publicly, treasuring it in our hearts and growing in the truth we have been given.

V. 18 was said to the disciples and Jesus used this illustration with them a couple of times. I think Jesus is saying to all of us disciples, when the Spirit shares something with us, if we don't use it, we lose it.

Vs. 19-21 I don't think Jesus thought His family would show up here, but He used the situation to show the importance of what He had just said. To be in relationship to Jesus was not to be a blood relative or even a Jew. Those closest to Jesus, male or female, Jew or Gentile, Greeks and those who wish they were Greeks, are those who hear the Word of God and do it.

Just to say it again, as disciples, our "doing" of God's Word is following the Lord in the harvest. His commandments are not primarily so we can live morally pure lives on earth and get to heaven with a clean score card. We are to obey His commission and glorify the Father by bearing much fruit and so proving we are His disciples. We are to labor in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

### **Psalm 69:19-36**

Remember, as you read this section, David's own suffering was given to him from God, to allow David to express some of what Jesus would feel in His last days in Jerusalem and on the cross.

Vs. 19-21 When I read this, I think of the Pharisees and Sadducees trying to humiliate Jesus. I think of Judas betraying Jesus. I think of Peter, James and John falling asleep as Jesus was praying in the garden.

Notice v. 21. Jesus was offered wine mixed with a narcotic, and then later, He was offered vinegar as He hung on the cross to keep Him alive until Elijah came to rescue Him. The people were hoping to see a miracle.

Vs. 22-28 This is David asking God to judge these people who were lying and pursuing him. Interestingly, Paul says that this happened to all of Israel in the form of hardness of heart and spiritual blindness. Verses 22-23 are quoted by Paul in Romans 11:9-10. Spiritual blindness led Saul and others to resist God, kill the priests, and pursue David. That same spiritual blindness led the nation of Israel to resist what God was doing in Christ and the church. The height of this blindness would have been seen in the crucifixion of Jesus. That generation was punished for rejecting their Messiah, as seen in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. and the scattering of the Jews.

Vs. 29-33 David became *a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples* (Isaiah 55:4). God disciplined and made David a great man though his suffering. He became proof of the grace and mercy of God.

Vs. 34-36 God had probably given David the idea of making Jerusalem, Zion, his city. And I'll bet in those years of running and hiding, David dreamed of the day he would bring the ark to Jerusalem. Yet this section has the hint of millennial glory. A day will come when Jesus will reign from Zion, and all nations will worship Him. Israel will glorify their Messiah and testify to His greatness and love.

### **Proverbs 12:2-3**

Again, sometimes you can get a lot more out of a proverb like this, especially if you're using it for a short message for a group, if you take it apart and put the parallel pieces together. Take time to notice the couplets and the parallelism in the verses. The second verse usually advances the image of the first verse. In The One Year Bible they do a pretty good job of keeping these couplets together.

<sup>2</sup>*A good man obtains favor from the Lord,*

(and in all the storms of life the branches might get beaten by the wind and he may be refined by fire)

*but the root of the righteous will never be moved.*

*but a man of evil devices he condemns.*

(and although he might look successful and God might use this man for His purpose)

<sup>3</sup>*No one is established (takes root?) by wickedness,*

Especially in hard times or hard circumstances, it costs something to follow Christ in the harvest and to remember we are here on mission. Our witness is often shown most powerfully in honoring God where others don't, and facing the consequences. It is more important that the lost see Christ than for us to get a "deal" or a promotion. I know a guy from the Ukraine who came to Christ, because a fool took a beating for Christ in the Russian army in Siberia. The guy's branches definitely got broken, but his root never moved and God gave him unknown fruit. My friend Peter watched and thought, "It would have been so easy to have lied. What would possess a man to take a stand like this in such a dangerous place?" Peter found out.

### **MARCH 29**

In Deuteronomy 8:3 we read why God gave Israel the manna. This is also the portion of Scripture Jesus used in His confrontation with Satan. I remember a time last year when there was snow on the grass, but it wasn't a solid blanket, but patchy little puffs all over everything. I wonder if that's what the manna looked like. As I thought about it and what God was teaching Israel, I was thinking how much I need all those lessons today in my life. Here's some of what struck me.

God could still do today what He did for Israel then, and He could meet all of my needs instantly if He chose to. So, I'm really very secure, whether I feel secure or not. In the wilderness, the people weren't allowed to gather the manna and store it up for security. They had to be secure in God, every day. They couldn't work the fields or make gardens because they never knew when they would be moving. Their lives were focused each day on the mercy of the Lord, learning of Him, waiting each day for His provision. God intentionally fed them like this, little by little, showing His power and showing that their security was in Him. They were to learn that man doesn't live by bread alone, nor by savings, nor by work, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Being secure in God's daily care and eternal power seems to be what God was also teaching David as he was living in caves and running from Saul.

How does God teach that same thing to us without taking us through similar experiences? It makes me appreciate my present situation and makes the day seem like something God has designed rather than a random mess. Life might not look "normal," but I am totally secure and

taken care of by God's daily provision. Our Lord is an amazing teacher, and His Word is strength and health to the heart.

## **Deuteronomy 11-12**

### Deuteronomy 11

It seems to me that this chapter concludes the introduction of the sermon. Moses restates 6:1-9 in vs. 18-21.

Vs. 1-7 Notice how often it talks about loving the Lord. The people were not slaves; they were saved. Their salvation should have made them grateful. They were to follow and obey out of that love for God. Moses tells them to consider what they saw. This was God's teaching and discipline. They were now to pass this on to their children who didn't see what God had done. They had seen how God used His power to free them from Egypt and destroy Pharaoh's army. God also disciplined a family of the Reubenites. Both events showed God's great power. One instance was deliverance and the other punishment. They needed to lay this to heart, as do we. They also needed to pass these things on to the next generation. In a sense, they were to make disciples.

Vs. 8-12 These instructions are being given out of love so the people will be strong, and not only win the land, but hold on to it. Notice again in v. 9 that the promise to Abraham is mentioned. The fact that God's eyes were on this land was a good thing, if they obeyed. If they obeyed, God would water the land and they wouldn't have to irrigate it like they had to in Egypt. That would be a good thing if they obeyed.

Vs. 13-17 This seems like it should have been an easy thing to have loved the Lord. Loving the Lord was in contrast to worshiping other gods. That would have been a "no-brainer" except that the worship in Canaan was very sexually oriented. And too, even for us, worshiping other things is easier than we think. I was reading Ephesians 5 this morning where Paul says that a person who is covetous is really an idolater. Even the Corinthian church had fallen into idolatry. We can all understand the cause/effect relationship here. Why would God bless the people if they were worshiping something else? The real question is, "How could they worship anything else when God was so big and real?" But now they had visual help. They had the manna each morning and the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud. Once they were in the land, they would have the feasts and the worship at the tabernacle. They would have to follow God by faith in the promise to Abraham and by obeying the law.

Vs. 18-25 There is a lot of restatement here, but it is very passionate, both from Moses and from God. God really, really, really wanted to bless them. Notice that when He tells them to *lay up these words* in their hearts, Moses also tells them how to do this in vs. 18-20.

V. 22 Notice again the restatement of loving the Lord and the promises that follow. It is obvious that we are nearing the end of a very important and passionate argument.

Vs. 26-32 In the context of the Mosaic covenant, there would be these blessings and curses. We'll read about this event later in Deuteronomy and we'll see it done in Joshua. It will be a testimony to the people. Actually, the people will testify to their need to obey and what will happen if they don't obey. The words will come out of their own mouths. This generation will obey, but apparently not in teaching their children.

V. 30 As Israel is receiving this command, Moses reminds them that in order for them to get to these two peaks, God will already have brought them into the land.

Though we are not under the blessing and curses, as disciples, there is something for us to learn here too. Even the best of us fall, and sometimes we have a hard time recovering. Sin and discouragement have an incredibly acidic effect on our hearts and minds. Not only that, Satan is

the accuser, standing before God telling Him we deserve judgment. Satan shares this with us too. In fact, Satan, like Balaam, lures us into sin so that God will have to punish us, knowing that God would never punish us if we didn't bring the punishment on ourselves.

So, how do you know if it is God humbling, teaching, or chastening you, or if it is Satan and your own fallen nature tearing you apart? Satan and self always tell you there is no more grace for you and that you are a failure. God never does that. This is why reading your Bible through is so important. Did Jacob deserve grace? Does Israel deserve grace? Wait until we get to Judges. Will David, the murderer, deserve grace? Or will Solomon, the idolater, who sacrificed his children, or Manasseh, who did worse than all of them and brought irrevocable judgment on his people, deserve grace? But they all received it. After repentance, even after falling into sin for the millionth time, God looks on us as a Father, encouraging our next step in obedience with His grace. And He will use us, just as God used all of those men after their repentance. Satan and self will destroy you and make you unfit to be used by the Lord. God will restore you. There may be consequences that you'll have to deal with, but you couldn't be loved more, and you will never be shunned by Christ. Look at Paul, the murderer, who remembered what he did right up to the end of his work in the harvest. Paul was an example of how Jesus will lift the fallen and bless them for His glory, just like us. *But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* (1 Timothy 1:16)

If you had a child who had done everything wrong and made every mistake, as a parent, would you condemn them to failure and self hate, or encourage them to health and obedience? And if they obeyed, would you rub their noses in their past failures or lead them on to restoration and success? This is what the Pharisees couldn't stand about Jesus, blessing a woman who had been a terrible sinner, or asking a tax collector to be His disciple.

## Deuteronomy 12

V. 1 This seems to be a key verse. So, after loving God, what did He want them to do?

Vs. 2-7 This would be very hard for Israel. First, they had to destroy all of the idols and places of worship. Some of the idols would be made out of precious metals. Some of these places might look nice, like a place where you'd want to come and meditate. But second, they themselves could only worship and offer sacrifices at the tabernacle. This was one way God wanted them to love Him. They were to come to only Him and then to come to Him only where it was appointed. The people in Canaan worshiped their gods on every hill and under trees. It is interesting that later when we read about the kings who followed God, many of them still allowed the people to sacrifice and worship in the hills and not in Jerusalem. No one had the guts to say "No."

Vs. 8-14 This is sort of like the tree in the garden. They could do all sorts of other things, but worship and sacrifice needed to happen in God's presence in the place He designated. Notice in vs. 7 and 12, there was to be rejoicing in God's presence as they celebrated their sacrifices.

V. 8 This is the refrain at the end of the book of Judges.

V. 9 This is the "rest" talked about in the book of Hebrews.

V. 10 Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, quotes this.

Isn't it interesting that the phrases from Deuteronomy were used so extensively in the rest of the Bible and people actually knew these verses? Now you do too.

Vs. 15-19 Up until now, if any domestic animal was killed to be eaten, it had to be brought to the tabernacle. That wasn't far away since they all camped around the tabernacle. Once they were in the land, the tabernacle would be too far away. Now they could kill the animal at the house, but there was one act of paganism they were not to take part in, and that was the drinking of the

blood or eating the bloody, undrained meat. God had been getting the people away from this during the wilderness wandering. Now they would just have to obey.

The offerings, on the other hand, had to be made at the tabernacle. Along with the offerings, they were to share with those who served at the tabernacle. They could always have feasts at home, but their worship was to be a celebration before the Lord at the tabernacle.

Vs. 20-28 Notice the repetition regarding the blood of life. This was a big deal for God, mentioned as far back as Noah. The repetition was important here. God was allowing them to slaughter their cattle for food, but with His guidelines.

V. 20 This verse links Jabez (1 Chron. 4:10) to this time of the conquest of the land.

Vs. 26-28 But here we are talking again about the sacrifices and worship. Notice that v. 28 brings them back to being careful to do what God is saying. They needed to obey for the sake of their children.

Vs. 29-32 This brings the chapter full circle. Again, these instructions seem like a no-brainer. Why would you want to understand why a pagan people offered their children in sacrifice? How could you be enticed to do that? And yet Solomon will.

I think Deuteronomy is incredible. And what is really interesting is that most of what God is saying to the people is exactly what we need to hear and apply to our hearts. We are not better than these people, and even with the Spirit, we are not above falling into the same traps. The Corinthians did. Maybe there are some innocent looking things in our culture that we don't need to become a part of. After all, we are here on mission, following Christ. As disciples in the harvest, we need to be careful how we walk, making the most of our time; because the days, as Paul said, are evil.

### **Luke 8:22-39**

Vs. 22-25 Do you ever think about being totally awed by God to the place of fear? Me neither. We need the Lord to restore this sense of awe to our hearts, and I think the place we find it is in the harvest, not special meetings at church or boat trips on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus shows His power where His passion is, in reaching the lost and dying, and making disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 26-39 Matthew has two men here. It is the same event and both Matthew and Luke are accurate, but Mark and Luke only quote the spokesman of the demonic duo.

V. 29 Apparently Jesus had commanded a spirit to come out and it did. Jesus saw then that the problem was deeper. A Roman legion would have been 6000, but that isn't to say there were 6000 demons in him. It is interesting that we are told in Mark 5:13 that the herd of pigs was about 2000.

V. 35 Luke tells us that the man was sitting at Jesus' feet when the crowds came.

Vs. 38-39 This is really all the Lord asks us to do on earth. So what has the Lord done for you?

### **Psalm 70**

Once again, those who seek the Lord like this are driven to their knees by need, so that, after waiting for His deliverance and crying out in desperation, they see and are awed by the salvation of the Lord. Then they declare to all men, from their hearts, that God is great. This is how God taught Israel, how He taught David, the disciples in the boat, and the possessed man. Why should I expect anything different if the Lord loves me and wants to use me as His disciple?

V. 1 This is the cry for help. This morning I was reading in Luke 18:7-8, where Jesus said, "*And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over*

*them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

Faith cries out and keeps crying.

Vs. 2-3 This is the usual gang of those who were lying against David and seeking to kill him.

Vs. 4-5 Verse 4 happens because of a heart like in v. 5. David was humbled before God and didn't seek help anywhere else. He learned this through suffering and God vindicated His servant. Amen.

### **Proverbs 12:4**

Seriously, I never go a day without realizing how blessed I've been since I gave my life to Christ. I have only known the first part of that Proverb, and that is pure grace.

## **MARCH 30**

### **Deuteronomy 13-15**

Look for recurring words, phrases and themes. There are some big themes that God is emphasizing for Israel.

#### Deuteronomy 13

Vs. 1-5 It's interesting that the example mentioned here is where the words of the prophet come true and God allows it to happen. Wouldn't miracles be a case for listening to what he says? Paul ups the ante on this and says in Galatians 1:8, *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.* I'll bet Paul was thinking of this portion of Deuteronomy.

I really don't think we grasp the consequences of sin and separation from God. Truth is vital and far more important than our experience. That is why the Bible is important. This thing on earth is happening so slowly and invisibly as to put us to sleep. Reality, however, remains unchanged. In spite of what we feel, there is a contest for the souls of men being waged every day. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:20, *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge..."*

By the way, this would have been someone like Balaam.

Vs. 6-11 Now this rule was only for Israel as they were a nation under God's rule. This is hard for us to choke down, I know, but the lessons of the wilderness taught them that, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:6, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump.* How much cancer is acceptable? What God is setting up here is a "perfect" society that He knows won't work. It won't work, not because it is a "perfect" society, but because there is something in mankind, inside of each person, that rebels against God. By the end of the book of Judges, everything will have fallen apart. Sin will be shown to be sin.

Vs. 6-7 Notice that the enticement is to worship gods they have never worshiped. If the argument is raised that they were told not to worship the gods of Canaan, then they might say, "I know, those were really bad and awful, but this god is from far, far away and is OK. It is from a place called 'USA.' Now we'll press this button here and watch the idol 'boot up.'" (I'm trying to be funny.)

V. 10 These gods were in contrast to the God they did know, who saved them. Notice how important their salvation was. As long as they treasured what God had done for them, they would be safe.

V. 11 If they did this, it would have a good effect in the entire land.

Vs. 12-18 Moses has gone from addressing the false messenger, to the false loved one, to the false city. This will happen at the end of Judges and the tribe of Benjamin will almost be lost. It is a very sad and conflicted story. But I'm sure this was repeated throughout Israel. In fact, one of those stories at the end of Judges shows the entire tribe of Dan going "idol." I think it is for this reason that the tribe of Dan is not mentioned among the 144,000 in the book of Revelation.

Since Christ, the power of the gospel and the love of God is the only thing that works in a pluralistic, relativistic, lost world. Society today doesn't give a parent or employer many rights on limiting the freedom of the people they are responsible for. As disciples of Christ, the truth we bring is wrapped in spiritual power and in the love of Christ working through us. Sin rebels against law. It is not so powerful when confronted by the love and grace of Christ. Today our work is not to shape people or nations by activism, but by working and witnessing and praying "under the radar" to see people come to Christ.

1 Timothy 2:1 - *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

#### Deuteronomy 14

Vs. 1-2 These verses attest to their great privilege on the earth and launches this chapter on being a distinct people for the Lord on the earth. Here, they are told not to copy this pagan custom of mourning for the dead.

Vs. 3-21 Since God says in the NT that all foods are clean, this was a law showing their "differentness" among the nations. It was the equivalent of them eating with a fork and a knife instead of their fingers or blowing their noses instead of picking them.

V. 21a Again, it showed a sense of propriety and "rightness" to their customs. I definitely wouldn't lament that I couldn't eat road kill or something that just fell over and died.

V. 21b As often as this is mentioned, I wonder if this was just a point of propriety or respect or if it had something to do with Egyptian/pagan ritual or superstition.

Vs. 22-29 This section is about the tithe and in that there is a link between only offering the tithes at the tabernacle and the provision for the Levites. In giving the tithes, there is the underlying value that this is important. But why? Does God need food? No. So do they give because of raw obedience? That only takes you so far. Valuing the presence of God at the tabernacle was faith. Providing for the Levites was also faith, because they scattered around the country and taught the people spiritual values. They were the "Sunday school teachers" of Israel. If the people lost the value of being a spiritual nation, they would stop coming to the tabernacle and they would stop providing for the Levites. These two "rules" showed what the people truly valued in their hearts. And, their tithing showed they understood that God was providing for them.

When the people came to offer the tithe of their crops, they were to celebrate before the Lord. This is kind of interesting because v. 26 suggests a feast and a celebration. Before the Lord, held in check by their love for God, they could buy any food and drink wine or "strong drink." There is the balance between the occasional being "merry of heart" and being a perpetual drunk. Drunkenness means being given to being drunk. There is a positive rendering of being mildly intoxicated that God doesn't seem to judge; for example, Ruth 3:7 - *And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.*

Vs. 28-29 Here was an exception to going to the tabernacle. On the third year, they brought their tithes into their own towns, invited the Levites who lived in the area and then held a feast for the Levites and all of the poor and needy. More on this in the next chapter.

## Deuteronomy 15

Vs. 1-6 Now, this would never work today. Apparently, not only was the 50<sup>th</sup> year the year of jubilee, where lands would revert back to the owners and slaves, but also people who had sold themselves to someone, because they were poor, would be set free. This canceling of debts and freedom of servants also came every seven years during the Sabbatical year. Today this would mean the credit card companies would cancel your bill every seven years!

Note that v. 6 gives the reasoning for this. If the people obeyed, God would so super-bless Israel that they would have so much that they would be sinning to hold back and not give freely. They were not to try to get rich, but to be openly generous with what God gave them. This sounds like some of the things Jesus said to His disciples.

Notice also that in v. 4, it says they would not have poor people, but in v. 11 it says they would always have poor people. So what does that mean? I believe it means that God would work things out so that there would always be people who needed help from others. This would be to test the hearts and generosity of the people. Personally, I would rather have been on the giving end of that process than on the end where God pulled the rug out from under me to put me on the receiving end to test the hearts of others. But it is obvious that God was going to do this. I think this goes for today too and extends to health care costs and to the protection of the helpless. Lots of wisdom is needed in all of this, but the point seems obvious; God keeps some people in a state of need to see if the surrounding society is humble and willing to care and share.

The contradiction in vs. 4 and 11 is dissolved in that God would bring people to the place of being poor, but Israel would meet their needs so that they would no longer be poor. That would be pretty cool.

Vs. 7-11 Again, remember that this wasn't true, genuine slavery. People were free after six years. Imagine today if someone was out of work and destitute. Mercedes comes along and says, "We'll give you a job, food and a place to live if you'll sign a 6-year contract." Isn't that nuts! Who would say no?

Vs. 12-18 In fact, if the situation were really good, at the end of six years, the "slave" could say he wanted to stay on permanently and could retire from there. The nations back then were largely farming communities. Help was always needed. The people were to be generous and actively help people by signing them on to work. God said He would bless them for that. For the provision of six years of food, clothing and shelter, a poor person worked. Not a bad set up for the poor. No local government was involved and no taxes were levied on the people to give aid to the needy.

Vs. 19-23 are again that test of heart and security in God's provision. Animals were valuable, yet as the animals gave birth, the first of those animals suitable for sacrifice had to be given back to the Lord. Sacrifice and gratitude were built into every day of everyone's lives. Those men and women of faith who realized they were set free and now blessed because of the promise to Abraham would love much and give back to God out of joy and thanks. To everyone else, sacrifice would be a religious duty. When we get to Malachi the people were not giving God the best, because they were pressed by hard times. It's hard to give when it hurts, but it really is hard to give if we don't believe or trust God.

I am so impressed in all of this, that God kept telling the people to remember they had been slaves and were now free. They were free because of God's amazing grace and His desire to bless. Do we work in the harvest following Christ for any other reason? He loved us. How do we

know? He set us free, dying for us while we were still enemies. As disciples making disciples in the harvest, we need to love the Lord and we need to remember that we were lost, but saved and found by His grace. A good song to listen to in this connection is "Remember Your Chains" by Steven Curtis Chapman.

### **Luke 8:40-9:6**

Luke 8:40-56

V. 41 This was back in Capernaum. Jesus was popular there and remember that Jesus just healed the servant of the centurion who built this synagogue. For Jairus to come to Jesus was one thing, but to fall at His feet meant that Jairus was desperate and believed Jesus could help.

Vs. 42-48 This was a God-planned fiasco. I'm sure when it happened Jesus smiled, knowing His Father was designing a situation in which many hearts would be revealed. I need to smile more.

This is the first time I've ever noticed that the woman was sick as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive. They were both 12, in a manner of speaking.

Unlike us, Jesus was not upset, anxious about the delay, or embarrassed by Peter's remark. I need to learn to abide in the Lord.

Vs. 49-50 This was Jairus' test of faith and by allowing Jesus to come to his house he was showing faith.

Vs. 51-56 Reading Mark's account, I have a feeling this went very quickly once Jesus got the mourners outside. He didn't want to draw attention to the event. I'll bet it was only seconds after entering the room that Jesus had her on her feet.

Luke 9:1-6

And now we have another twelve. This is just coincidence...I think.

To understand the chronology here a little better, read Matthew 9:27-34, then Mark 6:1-6 and finally Matthew 9:35-38.

It seems to me that the dramatic nature of these healings and the second rejection in Nazareth somehow added to the decision to send the Twelve out. Their confidence would have been high.

To read a more complete version of this, look at Matthew 10. Matthew was one of those disciples.

### **Psalm 71**

This psalm and the next four are pretty long, and it's easy to get lost in the alternating thoughts of crying out and confidence and desiring justice and praising God. I'd suggest you choose something(s) to underline; for example, the pleas (*rescue me, be not far from me, etc...*) or the praises.

This looks like it could have been written by David later in life and just before the fight with Absalom's army.

Vs. 1-3 This is vintage David. God was his refuge.

Vs. 4-11 Here you have the cry for rescue. David asks God to hold him now in his old age and failing strength as He did when David was young. Once again, David's enemies thought God would not save him. They forgot that God's grace was upon David.

Vs. 12-24 Notice how often David says he will testify to the Lord and notice how many ways he says he will do this.

I find v. 20 interesting, *You who have made me see many troubles...will revive me again.* Even David realized that God led him into troubles, to show him that he could depend on God and that God would revive him again. That is a good lesson for a disciple to learn. He leads us to bring praise from our mouths. So let's do it.

### **Proverbs 12:5-7**

I don't know. I guess I'd rather hang with the righteous dudes. So what does real biblical righteousness look like? Just, fearless, compassionate, and enduring. Jesus put it like this in Luke 6:47, *Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like...*

### **MARCH 31**

We've made it a quarter of a year! Don't worry about getting behind, just keep toning those "read the Bible every day" muscles. Eventually it will get a lot easier. Remember, put the Bible somewhere where you can see it and just read a page or two in passing. Some days it might not work, but some days I've done this and have been able to catch up a day.

This also means that you've read about a quarter of the Bible. That's something to celebrate. I'd suggest taking your Bible (and favorite friend) and going out to McDonalds, getting a Senior Coffee ☺ and their Cinnamon Melts ☺☺ and enjoying today's reading.

### **Deuteronomy 16-17**

#### Deuteronomy 16

These are the feasts again. Thanks to Laura, I'm seeing *at the place (He) will choose*, all over the place. I never saw that before. Remember, these feasts and festivals were meant to focus their hearts on God and His love and deliverance. This was not just for their celebration and joy, but also for their protection. This was a way for God to be sure they would always remember what He had done for them.

What also stands out to me more and more is how God keeps mentioning that He brought them out of Egypt and their slavery and made them the most honored nation under heaven.

Vs. 1-8 Israel was to celebrate the night God delivered them. This would launch them into the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, reminding them how God led them out of bondage. The final day was to be a Sabbath celebration. This feast was to have been attended by all the men, and it could only be attended in the place where the Lord made His name dwell. That would be at the tabernacle. It would be a national gathering.

Vs. 9-12 The *Feast of Weeks* was the Feast of Firstfruits and took place seven weeks and a day from the Sabbath celebration that ended the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was a celebration of God giving them fruit and blessing. This was Pentecost and a day to remember the freedom God had given. In the New Testament, this was also the day the church was born and the Holy Spirit began to indwell those who believed in Christ.

Vs. 13-15 This feast called the *Feast of Booths* or Feast of Tabernacles began with the Day of Atonement. For seven days the people lived in tents, remembering the years in the wilderness when God fed them and made them a nation. Remember Nehemiah 8:17. The people never celebrated this feast after Joshua died.

Vs. 16-17 This would have taken a lot of faith for all the men to take their families, leave home and spend a week in Jerusalem. But, it would have been their salvation, and the thought of their salvation would have been fresh in their minds.

Vs. 18-20 The mention here of the judges and officials seems logical since these guys would be models of obedience to the community and they would make sure that the people held to these feasts. You could imagine someone giving a judge a bribe to let him stay at home, instead of going to the feast and wasting his time.

Vs. 21-22 These things were not only planted or put up near altars but they were everywhere. The judges would see that this didn't happen. It didn't matter how artistic and beautiful the poles were; Israel was not to imitate the Canaanites.

#### Deuteronomy 17

V. 1 Since God was giving the best to Israel, they were to be bold and liberal in giving the best in return.

Vs. 2-7 To understand this section, we need to remember that for the past 38 years, Israel has been averaging 400 funerals a day. Why? Because someone rebelled against the Lord and many were swept with them into bitterness and sin. This wasn't an open license to conduct "witch hunts," but rather this was a way of keeping the nation pure. If any Israelite wanted to live in another country, and eat pork chops, and worship other gods, and not hold the Sabbath, all they had to do was leave and they were free. It was a big world and Israel was only a small piece of real estate. No one had to live in Israel.

Notice that vs. 4 and 6 indicate that there was a process. This wasn't to happen quickly; in fact, if it did happen it was to be a testimony to the nation to obey the Lord.

Vs. 8-13 If the situation was beyond them and they needed an answer, they just had to go to the place the Lord chose to set up the tabernacle and ask the priest. What was so special about the priest? He had a special pouch on his ephod (bib apron) where he had the Urim and Thummim, remember? Amazingly, you never hear of Israel using this except on a couple of occasions. Probably, they didn't believe it, or didn't want God's answer, and didn't want the hassle of having to travel all the way to the tabernacle.

Vs. 14-15 God knew the people would need a king someday. In fact, Jacob's blessing of Judah in Genesis 49 shows that the kings would come through Judah.

Vs. 16-17 Solomon, the wisest man in the world, broke all of these. In fact, the first thing Solomon did was make a marriage alliance with the Pharaoh of Egypt. Building an army showed a lack of confidence in God and pride in one's own leadership. And, as it says here, to get horses, you had to go back to Egypt. Gathering wives was also forbidden and Solomon had them in excess. When Solomon grew older, his wives influenced him to build altars to their gods and sacrifice there. Just think of that. Solomon built the temple to Yahweh as a young man.

Vs. 18-20 When it says "law," it is probably referring to the five books of Moses, or maybe only Deuteronomy. Under the supervision of the Levites, the king was to make his own copy of the law and he was to read from it every day of his life. I doubt that the wisest man in the world did that. I would say that David definitely did this when he was king in Hebron for seven years, and that Psalm 119 was a byproduct. I would also bet that Josiah made a copy of Deuteronomy.

So what would writing out and reading the first five books of the Bible do for a king? At this point, we can ask that of ourselves. What does it give you? You get creation, the fall, and the redemptive plan of God working through Noah, to Abraham, to Israel. It gives you a perspective of life and this world, and it fills you with mission. More than everything else you see God's love in working to free men from sin and death.

Notice too that the king was to read from his copy of the Word every day of his life. We know of no kings who actually did this, even David. My personal guess would be that Josiah read every day. Still, in what we will read we will see the incredible drifting of the nation under the kings.

This drifting might have been stopped if they had read the Word every day. Simply said, if it was important for the kings of Israel to have been in the Word every day, how much more important is it for us as disciples of our Lord to meet with Him, at His feet, in His Word, every day. That is how we continually grow in love for Jesus throughout our lives. And this is how the Holy Spirit gives us the joy of heart and the strength of heart to get up and keep following, every day.

As I was reading this morning, I thought of how important it is for us as disciples to be in the harvest and remember that God has rescued us. The further we get from the harvest, the less we remember what it was that God freed us from. Our salvation seems like a dusty trophy on a shelf. In Deuteronomy God constantly reminds Israel that He is the Lord their God who led them out of slavery. The same is true for us, as Jesus tells Simon the Pharisee, he who is forgiven little, loves little (Luke 7:47). How do we remember the value of our own salvation and where we were? By making disciples of lost people, we are constantly reminded of what it was that God freed us from and how needy we are of His grace and help.

Israel needed to go to the feasts to remember they were saved. As disciples, we need to be led by the Lord to the foot of Calvary (the Lord's Supper) and to follow Him into the harvest.

Luke 9:7-27

As you read all of this section, you can see how the parts fit together.

Vs. 7-9 Herod's question shows that everyone was wondering who Jesus was. Especially now with the Twelve going out and working miracles, there was more questioning. Eventually this will lead Jesus to pop the question to the disciples regarding His identity.

Vs. 10-11 The disciples returned exhausted and Jesus took them on a trip to a lonely place. Apparently they stayed too near to the shore and the crowds saw Jesus and ran there before them.

Vs. 12-17 This is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. What you miss in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is that immediately after Jesus fed the 5000, the people and many disciples left Him as mentioned in John 6:60-71. As the crowds and many of His disciples were turning away from Him, at that moment in John 6, Jesus asked the Twelve if they were going to leave too. Peter came up big in John 6:68.

Vs. 18-20 Notice that Luke mentions that before Jesus questioned His disciples, He was praying. Only Luke mentions that. When it says Jesus was praying alone, but the disciples were with Him, it probably means that because of the proximity of the crowd, Jesus was very near to the disciples as He was praying alone. I think Jesus usually found a quiet, private place, but this time the crowd prevented that. Jesus asks the disciples directly, "*Who do the crowds say that I am?*" Peter shines again and Jesus makes him the pope (JUST KIDDING!!!).

John doesn't have this specific questioning of the Twelve, "Who do men say that I am?" that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have.

Vs. 21-22 Notice that Luke leaves out Jesus' words of blessing to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19. Believe it or not, in Acts, there is a lot of tension in the Christian church, especially coming out of Jerusalem. You see this in Acts 11, 15:1, and in Galatians 2:12. It might be that because Luke hung with Paul, and Paul was being constantly hounded by Christians from the "circumcision party," that Luke didn't want to confuse his Gentile readers with Peter being the "big boss" and Jerusalem being the center of the world.

Vs. 23-27 Just before these words, Peter rebuked Jesus and Jesus rebuked him back. Luke left that out too. Since Jesus had just lost many disciples, these words to the Twelve would have taken on more meaning. There was a price in following Jesus. There would be glory; but they, like us, would always be tempted to stand out of harm's way and fail to announce their allegiance to Jesus and to His words.

We are always tempted to keep quiet, but our joy in our salvation can get us past that. It says that perfect love casts out all fear. If we are alive in the love of our Savior, who can we fear?

## **Psalm 72**

This psalm is supposedly from Solomon. If so, it sounds like Solomon was having a good day. Some think that this psalm has a prophetic element looking at Jesus' millennial reign because of the absolute language used that couldn't be referring to Solomon.

Since so much is said that would be self-aggrandizing if written by Solomon, I wonder if it wasn't written by David, perhaps the final thing David wrote, to make sure that the people would accept Solomon as their king. There was a great deal of tension and political intrigue when Solomon became king. Notice that it mentions a "king of Sheba," not a queen. And it does say that this psalm was the last of the prayers of David.

V. 1 Looks like this could be David asking God to bless his son.

Vs. 2-11 Look at all the requests for blessing that begin with the word *May*.

Vs. 12-14 Israel and her king were to show compassion for the needy based on their slavery and God's grace to them.

Vs. 15-17 This sounds like Deuteronomy. As a result, the people and the king would live long and be blessed.

Vs. 18-20 Again, this sounds like David to me. The Lord is to be blessed and glorified in all the earth.

## **Proverbs 12:8-9**

In some versions, v. 9 is expressed differently, indicating that there's something in the Hebrew that isn't clear. There seems to be a wordplay being made on the word *despised* in v. 8, so that it is immediately reflected in the word for *lowly* in v. 9. Also, it isn't clear if the good man in v. 9 has a servant or is, himself, a despised common worker.

The proverb might look like this;

<sup>8</sup>*A man is commended according to his good sense,  
but one of twisted mind is despised.*

<sup>9</sup>*Better to be despised as a lowly servant and do your work  
than to play the great man and lack bread.*

It seems that it is better to be despised for being humble, having good sense and doing your work well, as opposed to looking like a big man, saying things that are foolish and being secretly poor.

