

JULY 15

1 Chronicles 19-21

As you read today, remember that Ezra is writing to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Our question as we read is to understand why God is leading Ezra to include some information and leave out other information. You will read some things that seem verbatim with what you've read before. In a couple of parts you'll notice that Ezra leaves out a lot of stuff. Then you'll read a familiar story, but you'll notice that there is a lot more detail added. The Lord had His purposes for how He led Ezra to write for these people.

1 Chronicles 19

We've read of this battle before. I think the significance for Ezra in reviewing this entire story was that this was the largest foreign army David fought against. The situation began innocently enough, but God *allowed* it to escalate into a major international showdown. It was God's way of revealing threats to David and Israel and taking care of them. The Ammonites hired an army from the areas around Assyria and Babylon, and Israel defeated them with God's help. After this, the names of God and David were known as far as Babylon. The returned Israelites could depend on God for His help too.

Vs. 1-5 David was innocent of any false motives, but things still went bad. This was what had also happened to the returnees when they began to rebuild the temple. They were being charged with wanting to become rebels and reestablish an independent Israel.

Vs. 6-15 The words of Joab to his brother were exactly what the people needed to hear. They needed to be strong and to use their strength for their people and for the cities of their God. Israel's history showed that God would honor their faith and He would reward them for seeking Him.

Vs. 16-19 It seemed like things had gone from bad to worse, but history showed that the Lord was working in this to bring an even greater victory, and to bring renown to Israel and to His name.

These are also good lessons for us to learn for our work in the harvest.

1 Chronicles 20

Vs. 1-3 We've read this story before too, but what is interesting is what's missing. There is no mention of Bathsheba or the death of Uriah.

Vs. 4-8 This is a very thin summary, showing the returning generation that God rescued Israel from huge armies and (literally) enormous foes.

No one could stand before Israel if they sought the Lord.

1 Chronicles 21

We have also read this story. The twist here is that Ezra says that Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to do something that would bring God's judgment on Israel. The story was important for the returnees to know, because this is how the location for the temple was chosen.

It is interesting that Ezra points to Satan being against Israel. We know this is true, but this is the first time I can remember it being said. Israel had seen trouble and had been disobedient; and as a result, they were kicked out of their land. They almost ceased to exist as a nation and only God's grace in Babylon saved them. As the nation of God, tracing its roots back to Adam and Eve, they needed to keep in mind that they had an enemy who would incite them to sin. Even God's favorite son, David, when incited to sin, was punished.

Vs. 1-6 This is recorded in 2 Samuel 24 where it says that God was angry and incited David to take the census. This needs some thought. I would suggest comparing this to the situation of Ahab and Jehoshaphat who had already made the decision to work together without consulting God. God gave them the desire of their hearts, but God was clearly unhappy with them and allowed a demonic power to influence them. The point is that they had already sinned in their hearts and actions. I think David had already sinned by becoming so prideful of his nation that he felt he wanted to see how great he had become as a military power. In God's anger at David's pride, God allowed Satan to incite him. David was open and willing, and Satan knows a thing or two about pride.

Again, it is ironic that a man like Joab saw what David couldn't see. This often happens to us when we choose to sin. God speaks to us in some very ironic ways: through the mouth of a donkey here, and through the words of a bad person there.

Vs. 7-13 In 2 Samuel 24 it says that David's heart struck him. Here it says that God struck Israel and then David knew he was wrong. Apparently God began to move and then David saw the connection between the beginning of God's judgment and his prideful action.

Vs. 14-17 Ezra is adding more detail to his rendering of this story. He is showing that there was grace and purpose in what God did here. This threshing floor is the point of the story.

Vs. 18-27 We have a lot more detail here. *The angel of the Lord... commanded Gad* to tell David to make a sacrifice. It is a good guess that this angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ.

V. 20 It is funny that this guy and his sons *saw the angel* and hid.

V. 23 If I was that guy, with a deadly angel standing there with his sword ready for action, I'd just want to give the property away too.

V. 25 In 2 Samuel 24 there is another amount given, but David actually bought two things. He bought the threshing floor and the acreage around it.

V. 26 Here we learn that the Lord *answered... with fire from heaven*.

V. 27 Only then did the Lord command the angel to sheath His sword.

Vs. 28-30 The idea here seems that David recognized that this was where the Lord wanted David to worship every day, not in Gibeon. Gibeon was far enough away that David wouldn't have gone there regularly. This was the place of worship and sacrifice and seeking God's favor. Later, we will hear the name of this place is Mt. Moriah. It is where Abraham had been willing to offer Isaac, and it was the place where the temple would be built. Ezra was trying to help the returned Israel understand that this place of mercy should be their focus and priority as they sought God to rebuild the nation.

Romans 2:25-3:8

Romans 2:25-29

V. 25 What is the value of circumcision for a Jew? It is seen in Romans 4:11 regarding the faith of Abraham. It was a symbol of the promise of redemption through God's work in Abraham. It was what symbolized the nation built on faith in that promise. It still boiled down to faith. To break the law was to break faith and undo what circumcision meant.

V. 26 A Gentile who kept the law would show that he had both the faith in the promise to Abraham, and the work of redemption God was working in the world. It still boiled down to faith.

Vs. 28-29 In chapters 9-15, Paul will say that there is a difference between the church and the Jews and that the Jews will fulfill their destiny. There is no ground in Romans whatsoever to say that the church and Israel are the same. Paul's purpose in saying that a real Jew is a Jew inwardly

is that a real Jew is not only descended by blood from Abraham, but is a man or woman of faith in the promise to Abraham and shares the faith of Abraham. Romans 9 makes this very clear. The real descendants of Abraham not only have the blood tie, but they also have the faith tie. Paul's and the Spirit's logic is compelling.

Romans 3:1-8

Vs. 1-2 If the Jews had lived by faith, it is hard to overestimate the privilege and "advantage" mentioned here. Compare this to what Paul says later in Romans 9:4-5.

V. 3 God will still honor His promises to Abraham, to David and to Solomon regarding the temple and Jerusalem. The nation of Israel will fulfill its destiny and proclaim God's grace to the earth. Israel's rebellion doesn't show God's failure; it shows the truth of His Word and the wisdom of His actions. We'll see all this in chapters 11 and 15.

V. 4 This is one of those many places in Romans where Paul asks a rhetorical question that is answered very strongly with *By no means*. In the Greek this is a very, very strong denial. To get the right effect in the English, you probably need to take your shoe off and bang it on the table as you're saying this.

The issue of God being "judged" is interesting and very important in the dramas being played out in this time of spiritual darkness. Paul will mention God's righteousness again in this chapter. Although Paul will use some arguments in chapter 9 that will make it look like God can do what He pleases, God still brings about salvation in such a way that it is totally righteous and just. Satan is not only the accuser of the brethren, but he's keeping an eye on God too, to hold Him to the line. When all is said and done, without having to violate righteousness and play the card that says, "I'm bigger than you, so I can do anything I want," God will appear totally righteous, good and loving in how He brought about salvation universally and personally. (See Psa. 11:7 in today's reading.)

Vs. 5-7 We will see this argument surface in a different way in chapter 9. If God uses the unrighteous, does that make God unrighteous in judging the unrighteous? Of course not, but some people think they understand justice and righteousness better than God. Actually, to question God in this regard is rebellion and a lack of trust in who God is.

V. 8 Apparently some people twisted Paul's teaching on grace, as Peter says later, to their own destruction.

Psalm 11

As disciples following Christ, we don't live our lives according to the "tune" of our culture. We see a different reality and know a Savior who is still interested in seeing people saved. That means our lives have to take a different trajectory every day. No one else in the world rises every day to take a cross that declares they are following Christ to the death should He ask it. Our work in the harvest is to work as He worked whether or not others understand it or support it.

V. 1 is the taunt of the unrighteous. Even those who were running and hiding with David must have suggested that he abandon any thought of help from God and just head for the hills.

Vs. 2-3 As David ran from Saul, the resources of a nation were bent on destroying David. If David were killed, what would the anointing of Samuel mean? Yet they were really fighting against God, not David.

V. 3 This seems like what people are always attempting. If the foundational truth can be "redefined," then the righteous are helpless. But God doesn't change or go away. He is the foundation of truth and reality. Unbelief may rage against truth and reality, yet we are always secure. Paul and the Spirit say so in Romans 8:28-39.

Vs. 4-7 None of this escapes the Lord's attention or is beyond His sovereign working.

V. 5 The tension is that on the one hand, those who follow are being tested. Yet on the other hand, to the person not following God, this testing proves their point, that those who follow God do it in vain. And God knows their thoughts and sets His face against them.

V. 7 is our only true hope. As we follow, our lives are used by God for His purpose. Success is defined by the Lord, not by us or our culture. Our hope is in knowing we will see His face and know His kindness in Christ forever.

Proverbs 19:10-12

It's hard to know what to do with this little mish-mash.

V. 10 You have the disparity of seeing the foolish do well, but they do, especially in Hollywood.

V. 11 You have the internal wisdom that supplies a person with balance in an "unequal" world.

V. 12 Then there is the judgment of a "king."

I guess in all of this, the person made wise by following God can make sense of the disparity of this life and he knows how to seek the favor of God.

In reading all of this, there is the question of whether it's worth it or not to make so much of following God. Ezra is trying to make a case for living as God's chosen people. Paul is saying that the life of faith is worth pursuing. The psalmist is crying out after listening to people tell him there's really no help, but helping yourself. Even the proverb says it's hard to see the foolish prosper because it looks like they were right. But reality never changes. God has a plan and it's coming to completion. If you only do the speed limit when you see a cop, it means that you really don't see the law as important. If the only time we obey God is when we can see Him, that would be compliance, not love and faith. When we "can't see" Him working, but we keep on following in the harvest, that is love and faith. Others might think we've lost a couple of cards from the deck while they enjoy a comfortable life, but I'd rather follow, even if it means being hungry now.