

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 2nd 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.