

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.