

## **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 desert 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.