

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 1/500th of their stuff to the priests. The people tithed 1/50th 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.