

MARCH 7

Numbers 8-9

Most of what is happening here is in retrospect; that is, it happened before the census that begins the book. It is looking back to the order of service and the servants of the tabernacle and then to the first Passover in the tabernacle. If you look at the date notation of Numbers 9:1-5, you'll notice it is about 15 days earlier than the date given for the census in Numbers 1:1. Apparently God doesn't know North Americans always like to read things in chronological order. Actually, when this was written, who were the North Americans? Maybe they wouldn't have minded.

Numbers 8

Vs. 1-4 These were the seven lampstands inside the outer court around the tabernacle, but not the one lampstand in the Holy Place. These lampstands would have allowed for light in the courtyard. It makes sense that they would have needed light so that sacrifices could have been made in the evening and so the priests could see to go into the Holy Place in the evening. This was an instruction not given earlier.

Vs. 5-26 This cleansing of the Levites actually took place before the Passover feast in chapter 9. Logistically, this cleansing would have taken a few days, and it was important to get the Levites cleansed so they could serve in the Passover preparation and following feast.

Vs. 5-8 So, the Levites were cleansed outside and in. I don't know how to read v. 7. I mean, they didn't have to be bald, so does this mean shaving everything (armpits, etc.) or was it just some kind of trimming? It wasn't required for Aaron or his sons and, from this point on, was never required of any priest or any Levite.

My understanding of this is that it was a very visual, one-time cleansing, and that they shaved all the hair off their bodies, head to toe, like making them newborns, showing they were born for the service of Israel.

Vs. 9-11 Representatives of the people actually laid hands on the representatives of the Levites to set them apart for the service, thereby transferring the status of "firstborn" from the people to the Levites. In a way, the Levites were a ransom for the people. Read what it says about the Levites taking the place of the firstborn and the link to the Passover night when the firstborn were killed.

V. 21 Notice that it mentions a couple of times that Aaron offered the Levites as a wave offering. Usually the priest waved sheaves of barley or wheat in thanks to God for the harvest and then this offering belonged to the priests. This meant that whatever symbolism was present for Pentecost and the Feast of the Firstfruits was present here also. The wave offering was a thanksgiving for the provision and blessing of God, there represented in His provision of food, and here in His provision of service for the people. This tribe was given to serve and protect (v.19). The Levites were a living sacrifice presented to God.

Take your time reading this and do a lot of underlining. There is a lot of interesting stuff and lots of symbolism.

Symbolically, I think that this is what the church is meant to be to the world.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:15-16)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Numbers 9

Vs. 1-14 This Passover means that the people had been out of Egypt for one year. God has done some incredible work in a year, making them a nation with laws and order. The entire nation was built and focused around their worship of God. Every law and ordinance, and every feast and ceremony, have been connected to their relationship with God and His love for them.

Vs. 6-12 Notice in v. 6 there are actually guys who understood the laws and realized they were out of step and came to Moses and Aaron. What this tells me is that even though they were more than 2 million people, they were really obeying. I can't think of any group of two million people anywhere who all obey anything. It says in the text that it happened here. Too bad it wouldn't last very long. God made provisions for exceptions. If the people would have come to the priest and asked, it seems that God was ready to extend grace.

Vs. 13-14 It only makes sense that if people didn't want to be a part of this covenant community with God, they could have left. Israel had plenty of neighbors to whom they could have gone. But if they were part of the community, they needed to live according to the rules. It could be that being "cut off" would mean excommunication from Israel. Yet the fact that he would bear his sin suggests that if a man could, but didn't go to the Passover, he would be punished by death. In Israel's history, we will see plenty of patience and mercy on God's part, but ultimately, to openly resist God, or worse, to spit in His face, resulted in death. Foreigners, on the other hand, who became part of the community by circumcision, were invited to become part of the community.

Vs. 15-23 This is a summary of what happened when they moved, over the next 39 years. The tabernacle has just been set up, and the order of priests and Levites and the plan for taking down and setting up the tabernacle has just been given. Israel, organized as they are now, has never marched. That will happen tomorrow. Get ready.

There are so many things in this section that are amazing. They lived in the visual, daily presence of God's grace to them. They awoke every morning to the absolute certainty of His blessing. They had a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, and food every morning - miracles beyond our comprehension. How much more secure and blessed and confident as a nation could you be? And with all of that, in a couple of chapters you'll want to cry.

We, of course, are the same. We have been given the absolute blessing of the Father. We are secure eternally in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is exactly why we need the church. The church is comprised of disciples following Christ into the harvest to glorify the Father by bearing fruit and so proving to be disciples of our Lord. We need each other to keep us encouraged and focused on the truth, in the harvest and aflame in His love. We need each other. None of us is always up and always feeling great about ourselves or our walk with the Lord. This mission is very serious and full of joy and purpose to be sure, but we get tired. We forget the stakes are grave and that people without Christ, from every race and nation and language, are in some sense, our responsibility. We are to be those consecrated people, set apart by God, to give our lives in service to Christ to reach them, that they might be saved. This is the love and joy of Christ. To live for worship services and pot lucks has nothing to do with the true love of Christ, and it's not a lot of fun. It only gets us the kind of temporary devotion we see all over today, and what we'll see in Israel in the next week.

Mark 13:14-37

Vs. 14-23 Jesus is now issuing a future warning to the believing Jews who will be in Jerusalem during the Tribulation at the close of the age. The judgment of the Lord on the earth will last seven years. The first 3.5 years will take their toll in natural disasters, but Israel will enjoy peace from these disasters and from the attack of its neighbors. During this time there will be a revival of faith among the Jews, not only in a return to orthodoxy, bringing about the rebuilding of the temple; but many will come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. These followers of Christ will become the greatest missionary movement in history and will blanket the earth (Mk. 13:10). The hour when Israel will be a witness to the world will come. People from every nation will believe. In Jerusalem there will be two witnesses, like Moses and Aaron, who will be calling down all of this trouble. The book of Revelation shows us the "heavenly" side of what is happening (broken seals, etc.), but these two men will be the human side of the story.

At the midway point in these seven years, there will be a judgment in heaven. (It may be at this point, because Satan is otherwise occupied, that an army from the far north will come to attack Jerusalem and be destroyed as it camps in the area around the Dead Sea.) Satan will be cast out and everything will become much darker. The witnesses will be slain. Satan's human governor, the "anti-Christ," will finally be fed up with the Jews and the spread of faith (resistance to his rule). He will launch a campaign of extermination, against both the Jews and all believers in Christ. At this middle point, he will break the peace agreement with Israel, enter the temple and defile it, making it "unclean" for worship by setting up an image of some kind of abomination, and declare himself to be god or like god, a kind of Christ. At this point, when those living in that generation, who are in Jerusalem, hear of this guy entering the temple, they are to fly into the hills, probably toward Jordan and the Dead Sea.

V. 19 means that things will get exponentially worse. The Tribulation will kick into afterburner. Both Jews and Christians will be sought and killed worldwide; and yet, they will be hidden by some of the people on the planet. Let's call them the sheep. Not everyone will be blind to how the Word of God is playing out. There will be a minority from every nation who will have faith. Yet the time will be so intense that it would lead to the human race exterminating itself. The Jews as a people will cry out, somewhere, somehow, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;" and, as Jesus promised when He wept over Jerusalem before His crucifixion, He will come, in the clouds, returning to the Mt. of Olives where He left His disciples.

All of this will make sense for the people going through it. Verse 23 is Jesus' encouragement and warning to them.

Vs. 24-31 All of this is a summary of Jesus' coming, short and sweet.

V. 27 When Jesus comes He will come with everyone, all who have ever believed in Him from the OT and the church. Those killed during the Tribulation will also be resurrected. In sending out His angels at this time, He is gathering all of the Jewish and Gentile believers on the planet, unresurrected, to Jerusalem. After this, begins the judgment of the Gentile nations (the sheep and the goats) and then the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 28-31 In the parables, Jesus describes this as "the close of the age." A new age will begin. He will reign 1000 years on the earth. The generation mentioned in v. 30 is the generation that sees the temple defiled by the abomination that makes desolate. This is all meant to give hope to the people reading Mark and going through the great Tribulation.

Vs. 32-37 The hour of v. 32 is the initial time of the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation. Nothing will ever be normal again after the start, just like in the days of Noah. Things seemed fine up until the first drop.

When this begins is not for us to know. So, to make a cool transition and to figure out what we are supposed to stay awake for and what we're supposed to be doing, let's go to the disciples asking this question to Jesus.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11)

Psalm 50

So my question is, did you read 50 psalms last year? If not, congratulations! What an amazing thing, and it's only March and you've already read 50 psalms.

Your observations here are more valuable than anything I have to say.

This is the first psalm we've read by Asaph, the chief of David's singers. Asaph was present when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, and the sons of Asaph were present in temple worship throughout Israel's history.

Jesus just talked about the Tribulation. Look at v. 3; in fact, you can read the entire psalm in terms of God refining His people and preparing them for the final day of judgment on the earth. This is not only a messianic psalm, but it is one of those psalms when Israel's future glory is predicted.

Vs. 1-6 Notice all of the imagery here to the Lord returning to Zion. He gathers His faithful and calls the nations to judgment.

Vs. 7-15 The basis of salvation, even during the period of the law and the symbolism of the sacrifices, was always to love God. Verse 15 is something the nation will do during the Tribulation and before the coming of Christ.

Vs. 16-20 Notice in v. 16 that these people were religious, but not so in love with God that it changed them. Like most people, religion was a cloak to achieve their own ends and live like they wanted.

Vs. 21-23 This is the warning of the psalm. God will return with punishment and reward. Amen.

Proverbs 10:29-30

What is interesting in this stronghold is that it is relational. Knowing God and loving Him, following His way, is not dependent on education or wealth or race. The Lord protects those who love Him and follow Him, yet the reaction of those who resist Him will ruin them.

Notice that if you think of the truth being expressed here in terms of the reality of the Lord's return, v. 30 has a fuller meaning.

The sin within us is still the number one killer of mankind. The only cure is Christ. That is why we follow Him in the harvest, abiding in the vine, bringing the message of salvation and making disciples, who make disciples until our Lord appears.