

Blended Week 10

March 1: Numbers 23-25 and Mark 8:1-21

We read about Balaam's oracles; the pagan diviner hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. Balak and Balaam do a fair amount of traveling as they are trying to bring the Israelites to ruin. In the first oracle, God's love for Israel is proclaimed. The question is asked: How can I curse someone who God has not cursed? It is a fair question. If God has not given judgment against the Israelites, how is Balaam going to pronounce judgment against them? Certainly, there have been many groups that have tried to decimate the Israelites, yet they are still here. God makes a way for them even when the opposing forces are against them.

God continues to put words in Balaam's mouth. The pagan has now become the mouthpiece for the One True. In the second oracle, God shows that He is not like the other gods of Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian gods were often shown as whimsical and easily manipulated by bribery. God is not like that. He cannot be bribed with sorcery and divination. He is unchanging.

The third oracle given by Balaam pronounces that God will provide for the Israelites. There will be plenty of water, indicating that the crops will do well. This oracle also reminds them where their strength comes from. Their power comes from The LORD. The fourth oracle prophesies a future in Israel when she is a great kingdom. The star and scepter in verse 17 are symbols of a powerful and glorious kingdom that will subdue her enemies. God is using pagans to pronounce His words...

Meanwhile, the Israelites are camped in Acacia Grove in the lower Jordan River Valley. The men find the local Moabite women attractive and enter into relations with them. This does not bring the Moabite women to the Almighty God. Instead, it draws the Israelite men to begin serving Baal. God has been pronouncing blessings on them, but here they are going against His commands.

In the New Testament reading, we read about the feeding of the 4,000. This is another instance where Christ feeds many with very little. After the feeding, Jesus and the disciples go to the district of Dalmanutha. While they are there, the Pharisees demand a sign. Jesus assures them that no sign will be given. The fact is, even if He had given them a sign, the Pharisees still would not have come over to Christ's side. They would have remained in their hostility toward Him.

Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. In those days, yeast was a symbol for evil. It permeates, grows, and spreads. Just as the disciples were told to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees, we should as well!

March 2: Numbers 26-27 and Mark 8:22-38

A second census is conducted. In the normal fashion, the Levite members are counted separately from the men that could serve in the army. It would make sense that another count needed to be

conducted since they had lost many people due to their sinfulness. This census shows that there are 601,730 registered Israelite men. This number is large, but it also shows there was a net loss of 1,820 warriors. The loss is already high, but that is not the total amount that fell off lost. There was a little over 38 years in between the censuses. (Yes, that is the plural for census, I know it looks funny, I had to look it up). Because 38 years had passed between them, more fighting age men would have been added to their ranks over those decades. Some of the men would have aged out. Based on this information, we can conclude that there were many more lost that were not accounted for in this census.

We read an interesting case of the daughters' inheritance. Zelophehad died and had no sons to pass his inheritance to. The daughters pleaded their case to Moses saying that they should inherit his property. Moses consults The LORD and He agrees that the daughters should get the inheritance. I know this is common practice today, but this was a big deal back in the time of Moses. Up to this point, the inheritance always went to a male in the family line, even if the deceased had daughters.

Moses is getting on in years. He realizes the need for someone who will step in and take the mantle of leadership when he is gone. He asks The LORD about it and Joshua is chosen.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus heals a blind man. This time, when the man is healed, He tells the man not to enter the village. Up to this point, when He has healed folks, they would go to the priests to present themselves to be declared unclean. Unfortunately, when Jesus heals these people, all it does is bring condemnation on Him. Jesus has a conversation with the disciples about who He is. Peter proclaims Jesus the Messiah. Jesus then tells them about His upcoming death and resurrection. Peter, not understanding that this was the plan for salvation, rebukes Jesus. In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter. Peter was not thinking about God's plans, instead he was concerned with man's. Sometimes God is going to lead us to some strange places. Trust the process. It might not make sense in the eye of people, but it is part of His plan.

March 3: Numbers 28-29 and Mark 9:1-29

God gives instructions on what offerings are to be made. These commands reiterate the bloodiness of sin. At the Festival of Trumpet Offerings, the people are to not do any daily work. Instead, they are told it is to be a day of joyful shouting. When is the last time we gave joyful shouts to The LORD?

The Day of Atonement was the holiest day of the year. It required that the people hold a sacred assembly and practice self-denial. One act of self-denial is fasting, which led to this event being referred to as "The Fast" in later Judaism. The Festival of Booths required that the people stay in a tent or hut, imitating the early homes of the Israelites. It was important that the people remembered where they had come from. This act was to remind them of the protection that God gave them through their journey in the wilderness.

In the New Testament reading, we read about Christ's transfiguration witnessed by Peter, James, and John. His clothes became dazzling white. Elijah and Moses appeared and they were talking with Him. One thing I am curious about is how old Moses and Elijah looked when they were

talking with Jesus on the mountain there. That is one thing that I will not know on this side of heaven. A while back, someone asked me what happens when we pass away. Do we go into holding pattern, or do we go to be with The LORD immediately. Believe it or not, there is disagreement in the scholarly world about that topic. Based on the fact that Elijah and Moses were both talking with Jesus, this indicates that the moment we draw our last breath, we are joined up with Him.

After the transfiguration, they go to join the rest of the disciples. There is a large crowd gathered. There is a problem because a man has brought his son to be healed of a demon, but no one can get the demon out of him. Jesus rebukes the unbelief of the generation. In the man's request of Jesus, he says "If You can." Jesus's response indicates that it is the father's unbelief that is preventing the boy from healing. Christ is able. God can do anything. The father responds that he does believe, but in the same breath prays that He will help him in his unbelief. Have we ever felt like that? We have faith in God and know that He ultimately has everything worked out for our good. However, sometimes things can happen that make it seem quite the opposite. We can trust Him and have faith in His plan. Some days will be harder than others. When that happens, we have to faith it until we make it.

March 4: Numbers 30-31 and Mark 9:30-50

The importance of vows and fulfilling them are explained. A vow was a conditional promise, generally made in the context of a petitioning prayer. "If You do this, then I will do this". People that made oaths and vows to The LORD were required to fulfill them. However, there were certain circumstances where the vow would not be binding.

God then commands Moses to go to war against the Midianites. The Midianites were descended from Abraham and his wife Keturah. Sometimes they were aligned with the Moabites, the Ishmaelites, and the Amalekites. This group had led the men to fall into the sin of worshipping Baal earlier in their journey. Each tribe provides 1,000 men for a total of 12,000 to war against the Midianites. The Israelites easily defeat the Midianites and bring the spoils of war to Moses. We would think Moses would be happy with what they brought back. However, this was meant to be a holy war against the Midianites. In a holy war, all impure things are supposed to be eradicated. The army failed to do what they were supposed to do. That is why Moses is upset.

In the Matthew reading, Jesus and His disciples are on the way to Capernaum. They were arguing amongst themselves on the way. When they get there, Jesus asks what they were arguing about and they are ashamed to answer since they were arguing about who was greater. He tells them that if anyone wants to be first, he must be the last of all and servant of all. Jesus also uses a child as a lesson for them. Whoever welcomes a child in His name welcomes Him. If the child is not welcomed, then He is not welcomed either. Jesus then warns that it is better to have a millstone to throw around their neck and thrown into the sea than to cause a little one that believes in Him to stumble. As believers what we do and how we treat people matters. If we are loving toward people and helping where we can, we are truly acting as the hands and feet of Jesus. However, if we are hateful or rude, we are not just representing ourselves, but representing Jesus and that very well could turn someone away from Him. I would hate to one day stand before The LORD and have to give account for the times I drove people away from

Jesus based on my behavior. So the challenge is to treat people the way Jesus taught us to and not cause anyone to stumble.

March 5: Numbers 32-33 and Mark 10:1-31

The Israelites are preparing to enter the Promised Land. The Gadites and Reubenites are growing in number. They go to Moses and request to stay on their current side of the Jordan. Their intent is good, but Moses does not see it that way at first. Instead, he accuses them of being like the ones that deterred Israel from entering the Promised Land when they first got there. That denial to follow God's command cost them more years in the wilderness. The leaders of the tribes explained that they would send their fighting men over, but when the battle was done, they would come back and settle there, not in the Promised Land. Moses agrees to their proposal, but he warns them that if they flee the fighting before the war is over, they will certainly sin against The LORD.

From there we get a review of their travels in the wilderness. Their time of wandering is coming to a close. They are looking at where they have been before they focus on where they are going. God gives instruction to Moses that when they get to Canaan, they must first drive out all of the inhabitants before they destroy their gods and demolish the high places. He warns them that if they do not drive out the inhabitants like they have been ordered, they will become thorns and harass them in the land that they now live.

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks about marriage and blesses the children. Then we read the case of the rich young ruler. This young man has it all, he has money, he has fame, he has youth, but he does not have eternal life. He asks Jesus what he must do. He explains to Jesus that he has followed all of the commands. Jesus explains that the young man lacks one thing. In order to gain what he lacks, he must go and sell all he has and give the proceeds to the poor. The young man walks away upset. The problem is not that the man had many possessions, the problem is that the man was owned by his possessions. He was not willing to part with them. He viewed the things of this world as being of more value than the kingdom of heaven.

Do not be fooled. The things of this world will fade away. Nothing in this world lasts forever, except for your soul, my soul, and the eternal world of God. Everything else fades. For example, Dania and I recently got a new car. This was completely unexpected, but necessary. The van we had owned for about six years and planned on having for at least five more died on us and the cost to repair was way more than what the vehicle was worth. While we did not necessarily have faith in the material possession, we did have an expectation of it and it spectacularly failed our expectations. The point is that material things will fail us. God will not.

March 6: Numbers 34-36 and Mark 10: 32-52

The Israelites are gearing up to go into the Promised Land. God establishes the boundaries of the Promised Land with the Israelites. He also gives them the rules on their cities and the requirement for six cities of refuge. These refuge cities were intended for folks that accidentally killed someone. If a person accidentally killed someone, they were put into a sanctuary city. The city of refuge was not meant to be a punishment, but instead for protection. If they had

accidentally killed someone and remained among their people, someone that loved the person they killed might decide to avenge the loved one's blood. As long as they were in the city of refuge, they were protected. It is interesting to note that if they left the boundary of the refuge city and were killed by an avenger, then the avenger was not guilty.

God gives them instruction on how to tell if someone accidentally killed someone or not. It generally comes down to intent. If someone picks up a rock with the intent to harm someone, that person is clearly guilty of murder. However, if the person drops a stone not knowing someone is under it and the person is killed, then the one dropping the stone is not guilty.

Earlier, we read about Zelophehad's daughters and their right to keep their father's inheritance since he had no sons. This causes a potential issue with land distribution amongst the clans. The tribe of Joseph's descendants are specifically worried that if these women marry, then their land will become their husband's and now part of that tribe's land. As a result, a decree is made that marriage must happen within the clan of the ancestral tribe to prevent the land changing tribal ownership.

In the New Testament reading, some disciples are trying to make themselves prominent within their group. They request to sit at Jesus's right and left hand. Jesus asks if they can drink the cup that He is about to. The claim they can. Eventually, they will both be martyred. Jesus explains to them that to become great, they must become servants. It is a difficult concept for us to grasp. In the kingdom of heaven, there really isn't much of a hierarchy. There is God and then there is everyone else. We won't have power or position over each other in heaven.

March 7: Deuteronomy 1-2 and Mark 11:1-9

Deuteronomy means "second law" or "repetition of the law". As we read through Deuteronomy, we will see many of the laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers repeated.

Moses speaks to the Israelites across the Jordan. The reference here is from the perspective of one standing in Canaan to the west. It has been 40 years since the Exodus from Egypt. Moses recounts their travels and the issues of sin that have kept them from moving into the Promised Land. We read more about a race of giant people, the Anakim. The Anakim were named for Anak, a descendant of the founder of Hebron. Some of them moved to Philistia and may have been related to Goliath and other giant Philistines.

The people are reminded of the various lands they have traveled through. They are also reminded of battles they engaged in.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus makes His way into Jerusalem for the last time. His disciples bring Him a colt to ride into town on, fulfilling prophecy. As Jesus enters the city, people are placing palm fronds and their coats in front of Him, identifying Him as Hosanna in the highest. Unfortunately, their delight with Him is short lived. Jesus goes to the temple complex and drives out the money changers and those selling livestock. This draws the ire of the chief priests and scribes. They are afraid of Him because of the crowd's reaction to Jesus. The chief priests and scribes were not going after Jesus because He was teaching incorrect things.

They were going after Him because Jesus was taking away their captive audience. They were worried that Jesus would take away their stature and clout. As a result, they began seeking a way to destroy Him.

March 8: Deuteronomy 3-4 and Mark 11:20-33

We continue to read about more of Israel exploits against the nations as they traveled the wilderness. Chapter 5 verse 11 refers to the "bed" of the king of Bashan. This most likely is referring to Og's sarcophagus. The Israelites had been called to completely wipe out their enemies. The king of Bashan would be included in that list. Moses is stating that the only thing left of Bashan is the king's burial place.

Moses begs The LORD to let him come into the Promised Land. He proclaims how wonderful and mighty God is. Moses confesses that there is no god that can do what He does. However, The LORD will still not allow Moses to enter the land. Rather than put the blame on himself, Moses puts the blame on the Israelites. He does this in both chapters of today's reading. Moses had been barred from entering the Promised Land because of how he handled drawing water from the rock in Numbers 20. Moses does the right thing at first, asking God what to do. However, when he assemble the people, he calls the people rebels and asks if "we must draw water" for them. What Moses did there was put himself on equal footing with God. He was judgmental toward the Israelites. Further, rather than give God the credit for drawing water, he takes some credit too. Moses was prideful. We could even go so far as saying that he was guilty of hubris. Hubris is one of my favorite terms from the classic Greek tragedies. It is the excessive pride that makes a person think they have the same power as God.

The fact that Moses blames the people is not quite fair. Certainly, it was their rebellion that caused his frustration. However, they were not responsible for his reaction. Moses was. It cost him the ability to enter the Promised Land. When it comes to sin, it is easier for us to put the blame on someone else. However, when it comes down to it, people can only tempt us to sin. Us as individuals are the ones that commit the sin, not those that tempt us.

In the Mark reading, Jesus talks to the disciples about having faith that can move mountains. As believers, we can have faith that God is going to answer our prayers. God always answers our prayers. His answer is either a "yes", "no", or "wait". Whatever His answer is, we can be sure that it is for His glory and our benefit. Jesus's authority is also challenged by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. They want to know who gave Him the authority to do what He is doing. Jesus asks them where John's baptism came from. Was it from men or heaven. The religious elite do not want to answer because they know that no matter what answer they give, it will not go in their favor. If they answer from heaven, then they are admitting that Jesus is worthy of belief. If they say from man, then the people will be mad at them because they considered John a prophet. I think one of the biggest problems these folks ran into is that they knew the truth, they just did not want to believe it because it meant they would have to change their ways.