

Blended Week 12

March 15: Deuteronomy 23-25 and Mark 14:51-72

In Deuteronomy, we read about fairness laws and other commands for the people. If a slave escapes from his master and moves within their gates, they are not to return him. Instead, he is allowed to stay. Both men and women are forbidden from being cult prostitutes. We would think this was a “No brainer.” However, one thing about the cult practices of the time (and why they were so popular), is that they had to do with sex. In these cults, that is how they worshipped their deity. The people are also forbidden from charging interest on loans. Further, if they keep collateral, such as the cloak of a poor person, they are to return the cloak at night so that the borrower can keep warm while he sleeps. One thing is certain from these rules and regulations that God is giving: He is concerned with taking care of the poor, the widow, and the fatherless. As His followers, we should do the same.

They are instructed on how to keep the family line going in the event two brothers live on the same property. If one dies without a son, the brother is to marry his sister-in-law with the intent of having a son with her to carry on the family name. This was known as the levirate custom from the Latin “Levir” meaning brother-in-law. Progeny was important to them. If we look at Abraham’s call, we see that there is the promise of lots of descendants. The people wanted children to pass their property and possessions to. Preserving the family name was incredibly important to them!

In the New Testament reading we read about the effects of Judas’s betrayal. Yesterday, we learned that every one of Christ’s disciples abandoned Him when He was arrested. Now, Mark tells us of a certain young man that was wearing a linen cloth around his body. They grabbed at the cloth, and he was so determined to get away, he left the cloth behind and ran away naked. He would rather run through town naked than be identified as being with Jesus. Though we are not told who this person was, most scholars believe that it was none other than John Mark, the author of this Gospel narrative.

Jesus goes before the Sanhedrin while Peter follows from a distance. Jesus is accused of threatening to destroy the temple and raise it in three days. Rather than answer their accusations, Christ keeps silent. He knows that no matter what He says, their minds are made up. The only time He speaks is when He is asked by the high priest if He is the Messiah. Jesus replies, “I am, and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” With that, the scribes, priests, and the rest of the religious elite decide they have enough to charge Jesus with blasphemy.

March 16: Deuteronomy 26-27 and Mark 15:1-26

As the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land, the land “flowing with milk and honey”, they are given instruction on what offerings to bring to The LORD. They are to take some of the first of all the land’s produce, put it in a container, and present it to The LORD. In the third year, rather than present the tenth to The LORD, the produce will be given to the poor. Back then,

there were no social welfare programs, and the poor were reliant upon friends, neighbors, and clergy to help them get by.

The covenant is summarized for the people. They are commanded to keep their end of the covenant. If they do what The LORD requires of them, then He will bless them abundantly and protect them from their enemies. However, if they do not, then God will not offer them protection. As we continue our reading, we will see that they chose not to uphold their end of the covenant as the course of Old Testament history plays out. It begs the question why they would think The LORD would bless them if they were rebellious. Do we do the same today? Do we expect blessings from The LORD even when we are in states of rebellion?

When they enter the land, they are to write the laws on stones so that they have a reminder of what God commands. It is to serve as a reminder of this covenant and help keep them on track.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus is sent to Pilate. The Pharisees and Sadducees did not have the authority to impose the punishment of crucifixion. The Roman governor had to do that. Pilate asks Jesus if He is king of the Jews. Jesus simply responds, "You have said it." Pilate then offers to either release Jesus or release Barabbas, which was customary of that time. The people scream for Barabbas to be released.

Notice that Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent. He knows the only reason the chief priests are upset with Jesus is because of their envy of Him. They are upset that He came in and challenged their authority. The fact is that they had abused their authority. Their "holiness" was a spectacle as they sought for people to look on them with great awe at how holy and close to God they were. They had made it about themselves. It was never meant to be about them; it was meant to be about God. The same is true of the Gospel. It's not about us. It's about God and what He has done for us.

Jesus is hung between two common criminals. Above His head are His charges, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." Though Pilate and the rest of the Romans followed their own pantheon of gods, they at least knew enough to identify Christ by His true identity.

March 17: Deuteronomy 28 and Mark 15: 27-47

God promises that if the Israelites are obedient to Him, then they will receive plenty of blessings from Him. He has blessed them up to this point and the blessings will continue if they do as they have been commanded. However, they are also taught that if they do not follow God's commands, then they will suffer for their disobedience. He promises that they will be uprooted from the Promised Land and other nations will mock them. In a more upsetting prophecy regarding future problems is that they will result to eating their young because they will be so hungry. Sadly, this prophecy does play out in the history of the Israelites. 2 Kings 6: 26-29 catalogs an instance of cannibalism in their history.

What amazes me is that these folks have seen how well God took care of them. Their ancestors had been freed from Egypt. He provided manna for them and water from the rock. God consistently takes care of them, but when things start going easy, they begin to depart from Him.

Maybe that is human nature? For some reason, people can be inclined to only cry out to God when things are not going well. Then when things are fine, they just kind of forget about what He did to make things well. The goal as believers is to cry out to The LORD regularly, whether it is a cry of despair or a cry of joy.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus is hung between two criminals. The people stand and yell at Him to save Himself. When He does not, they begin to mock Him saying that He saved all these other people, but He cannot save Himself. Then they tempt Him by saying that if He would simply take Himself off the cross, then they will believe. I call balderdash. These people had seen all the other miracles Christ performed before this moment. Even though they were eyewitnesses to what He had done, they still do not believe. If Jesus had saved Himself, which He could have, then they still would not believe. Jesus remains on the cross, suffering for the sins of all people, and succumbs to death after a few hours.

Joseph of Arimathea is given Christ's corpse. He anoints the body as best he can and places it in a tomb. The tomb will not be used for very long, though.

March 18: Deuteronomy 29-30 and Mark 16

The warnings of disobedience continue. Yet in all of these warnings, there is the hope and promise of restoration. God has established this covenant with them. They are warned to not get puffed up and full of themselves because of this covenant. In fact, they are given the example of someone that hears the words of the oath and he considers himself exempt, thinking that he will enjoy the peace even if he goes his own way. That will not work. If the person is to receive the blessing, then he or she needs to obey God's commands.

If they do not uphold their end of the covenant and The LORD gives them over who is to blame? This Scripture makes it abundantly clear that it is their fault, not The LORD's. Rather than other nations coming alongside and having pity on them for losing their status, will put the blame squarely on the Israelites, not The LORD. If they start chasing other gods again and worshipping idols and The LORD uproots them, it is their fault, not God's.

They are encouraged to love The LORD with all their hearts and do His will. That is how they will prosper.

In the Mark reading, some of the women that had been following Jesus arrive at the tomb to finish anointing His body. They find that the tomb is in fact empty. Jesus is alive. He has defeated the grave. They dutifully report these findings to the disciples and let them know that Jesus has resurrected. It is worth noting how the disciples respond. They respond with disbelief. The story is so incredible, that they refuse to believe the first witnesses. Even though Christ had told them what was going to happen, they first respond with unbelief. If these first witnesses had a difficult time getting the people that followed Him to believe that He overcame the grave, we can be assured that there will be folks we interact with that will not believe it. However, our job as believers is to continue witnessing to folks, showing them how awesome God is and what He has done by both deed and word.

The disciples come around to believing that Jesus has resurrected, but they are all sternly rebuked by Jesus for not believing the women that brought the news to them.

March 19: Deuteronomy 31-32 and Luke 1:1-23

Moses is 120 years old now and cannot continue to lead the people. Joshua is chosen to lead them into the Promised Land. Moses will be able to see the land, but he will not enter it because of the instance where he drew water from the rock without giving God credit. God tells Moses that his time is ending. He also tells him that the people will soon commit adultery with foreign gods. That had to have been pretty tough for Moses to hear. He has devoted most of his life to helping these people out, but they are still just not getting it.

God tells Moses to teach the people a song to remember in their destitution. The song begins speaking about what God had done for them, showing His power and glory. From there, it catalogs the various sins of the people and closes with a promise that God will take vengeance upon the enemies. Though the point of the song might seem to be one of vengeance, the overarching theme is God's sovereignty and fairness. He is faithful, without prejudice, righteous and true.

We get into Luke today. Luke was a medical doctor. He wrote this book and the book of Acts. Both books are dedicated to Theophilus. We do not have any information about Theophilus other than the fact that the name means "lover of God". Luke is seeking to give his eyewitness account of Christ's life. He gives the pertinent data that he observed starting with John the Baptist's dad Zechariah. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were both righteous people, but they had not had children. They were on in years and they thought the window was closed. But God makes a way that Elizabeth will bear John the Baptist. He will announce the coming of Messiah and will be filled with the Holy Spirit even in the womb. Zechariah asks how he can know this and he is immediately unable to speak because he questioned the announcement. When he finally leaves the sanctuary, the other people know that he had to have a vision while he was there.

March 20: Deuteronomy 33-34 and Luke 1: 24-56

Moses gives the Israelites blessings before he passes away. He goes over the various tribes and talks about what they have done and what is in their future. Moses goes up from the plains of Moab to Mt Nebo where he can see Jericho. God then reminds Moses that the land is promised to his descendants, but he is not allowed to enter the land. However, God allows him to see it with his own eyes. Moses' mission is complete. He breathes his last and is buried. We do not know where he was buried. The text says that his grave was there "to this day". That was true at the completion of Deuteronomy. Later, in the New Testament times, Jude will write about the mystery surrounding Moses' burial spot.

We are told that Moses did not lose any of his vitality for the 120 years that he walked the earth. Feasibly, if he had not messed up by bringing water from the rock and equating himself with God, he could have lived a while in the Promised Land and enjoyed some of its blessings. Or he could have lived for a while in the wilderness without crossing into Jericho. However, it was his

time to go. He lived a full life and was remembered as enjoying a special relationship with God Almighty.

In the Luke reading, Mary is visited by Gabriel. He informs Mary that she will give birth to a son. She is curious as how that could happen since she has not been intimate with a man. Gabriel informs her that nothing is impossible for God. He invites her to consider that her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth in her sixth month of pregnancy. When she arrives, the baby John leaps in utero since he feels the presence of the pre-born Jesus. We are told that Mary stays with Elizabeth for three months. It is unclear whether she is there for the birth of John the Baptist, but most think that she probably remained long enough to see him born. There was a spiritual bond between the two babies and both would play important roles in the future of God's people.

March 21: Joshua 1-3 and Luke 1: 57-80

Moses is dead. Joshua has command of the people now. It is fitting that he would receive encouragement from The LORD. Many of the things that He is commanding Joshua will be repeated to other Israelite leaders throughout the Old Testament. The command to be strong and courageous was already spoken by Moses. It will be used before big undertakings like David's charge to Solomon to build the Temple, King Hezekiah's encouragement to his people to withstand a siege, and Joshua's charge to Israel to fight.

Joshua sends spies to Jericho. They come to the house of Rahab a prostitute. Jericho's king sends men out looking for the spies. When they approach Rahab's house, she tells them that the spies had already left and she did not know which way they went. The truth is that the spies were in the stalks of flax on her roof. This is another one of those instances where we see an example of someone lying and benefitting from it. We saw the same thing when it came to the midwives delivering Hebrew babies. Rahab explains that the entire land is overcome with fear since word of God drying up the Red Sea and the defeat of Og and Sihon. The people of Jericho know that God is with them and so their courage has failed them.

Rahab is different from the rest of the people. The news of what God had done for the Israelites brings her to belief in God. She helps them with the agreement that she and her family will be spared at the onslaught. The spies agree. If someone in her family is harmed, the blood is on their hands, but if she reports their mission, then their oath to her is null and void. This indicates that even if the king found out about their mission, they are still planning to enter the land unlike last time. The first time they got here, they were afraid and decided not to go in. As a result, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They were not going to make the same mistake again!

Again we see The LORD make a pathway through water for them to cross. This time, the people will cross the Jordan into Jericho on dry land. We are told that the Jordan would overflow its banks in harvest season. Sadly, that is no longer the case. I had the privilege to visit Israel a while back and several spots within the Jordan are not nearly as deep or wide as they used to be. In fact, the flow of water through the Jordan has been so slow, that the Dead Sea's water level is falling.

In the Luke reading, John the Baptist is born. When it comes time for the boy to be circumcised and named. It was customary for the first born to be named after the father, that is why they looked to Zechariah when Elizabeth stated the child would be called John. Zechariah writes out on a tablet that his name is John. At that, he was able to speak again. Zechariah then delivers a prophecy about what great things his son will do to prepare the way of Messiah.

March 22: Joshua 4-6 and Luke 2:1-24

The entire nation crosses the Jordan on dry land. Twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, are told to take one stone each and place it in the middle of the Jordan where the priests are standing. These stones are to remind the people about what God has done for them as they traveled into Jericho. The Lord again dried up the water, just as He had when the Israelites were traveling across the Red Sea. They are reminded to tell their children about what God had done for them. They are to give their testimony. The testimony of a believer is important. We can read what God has done for the people in the Bible, but we all have stories about the things that God has done for us. It is important to let people know that God is working in our lives.

A rather unpleasant thing happens for the people. Since they have been wandering the wilderness for so long, the entire generation of men were not circumcised. The LORD commands Joshua to circumcise the men "again". By stating "again" God is reinstating the covenant He had established with Abraham. They have a feast from the produce of the land. The very next day, the manna stopped. From here on out, they will eat from the fruit of the land.

The defeat of Jericho was relatively simple. Joshua, priests carrying the ark of the Lord, seven priests with seven trumpets, and the armed men marched once around the city for six days blowing the trumpets. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times in the same way. After the seventh time, the people shouted and the walls of Jericho fell. They are warned to not take the set apart things when they go in to take the city. The treasure is set apart for The LORD. Rahab and her family are rescued, just like the spies had guaranteed they would be.

In the New Testament reading, Caesar Augustus decrees a census must be taken. So Joseph takes Mary to Bethlehem to be registered. While she was there, she gives birth to Jesus. The shepherds outside of Bethlehem were keeping their flocks when an angel of the Lord appeared to them and told them the great news that the Messiah had been born. The sheep these shepherds were keeping were no ordinary sheep. Those were the sheep that were sacrificed for atonement at the temple. Now that the Messiah is here, there will be no need for keeping these special sheep anymore. Instead, it will be the Messiah that will reconcile His people to Him.