

## Through the Bible

### Numbers 18-25

#### Recap of 16 & 17

-We are actually going to start with a recap of Numbers 16 & 17 since we did not have time to cover this last week

-Ch 16 describes the egregious rebellion of Korah, who recruits 250 others and incites a rebellion or coup to get rid of Moses (likely so they can go take the land that just the day before they learned they would not get to enter)

-Korah treats the duties of the priests as common...arguing that all of Israel is set apart, so they should all be able to serve God the way Moses and Aaron do

-Moses' reaction is to fall face down on the ground and then challenge Korah to a showdown:

- the next day they were to light incense burners and the Lord himself would choose between them

- Moses also confronts Korah as a Levite who is already set apart with a special ministry...but now he is essentially demanding the priesthood as well

- and while they are all set apart, they don't have the PRIESTLY set apartness

-When Moses summons Dathan & Abiram, they refuse ("you aren't the boss of us")

-and they accuse Moses of forcing them out of the land "flowing with milk and honey"

- NOTE: they are talking about Egypt, using God's language for their promised land!

-God was already angry, and now so is Moses

-The next day Moses and Aaron and Korah and the 250 others stand before the Lord

-God wants to destroy Korah and the 250 others...they have disrespected God and his appointment of the priests

-they are handling incense and they are not authorized or "set apart" for this  
And they pay with their lives

-Korah and his family were swallowed up into the earth

-the 250 leaders were burned alive with fire that "blazed out from the Lord"

-and their incense burners are hammered into an atoning cover of bronze that was placed as a cover over the Ark of the Covenant

- this was a reminder that the Israelites should never enter the Lord's presence and offer unauthorized incense/fire...if they did, they could expect to suffer the same fate
- all seems to be clear
- and yet THE NEXT MORNING, the people continue to "mutter" against Moses and Aaron, blaming them for the death of the people the day before
- Again, no reverence, no fear... a total lack of respect...familiarity and entitlement
  
- God is AGAIN, ready to destroy them
- Moses and Aaron intercede
- and Moses has Aaron burn incense and carry it out among the people
- READ Numbers 16:46
  - to purify them (MAKE ATONEMENT/make them right with the Lord)
  - because a plague had begun
  - this incense DOES make atonement, but not before ANOTHER 14,700 people die
- Ch 17** has the Lord directing Moses to (essentially) settle this once and for all
  - Moses is to tell the people of Israel to bring 12 wooden staffs (one from a leader of each of the tribes) with the leader's name on the staff
  - Aaron's name is on the staff for the tribe of Levi
  - the staffs are to be placed in the Tabernacle in front of the Ark (which contains the tablets of their Covenant)
  - God says he will be there and the staff that buds and sprouts will be the man he chooses
  - this will put an end to the complaining
  - they agree and obey
  - the NEXT DAY Aaron's staff had **sprouted, budded, blossomed AND PRODUCED RIPE ALMONDS**
  - Each of the staffs were brought out for the people to see and Aaron's staff was placed permanently before the Ark to serve as a "warning to rebels"
  - \*So INTERESTING: what the swallowing up of an entire family, the incineration of 250 others and then the death of nearly 15,000 in just 24 hours could NOT do...the silent budding of a stick did.

And finally, we come to today's chapters

-after the validation of Aaron as high priest...God now addresses Aaron directly.  
This is rare

-God sets out some new rules and reiterates some existing rules for how the priests are to care for the Tabernacle

-The priests (Aaron and his sons) are to guard the Tabernacle from the inside, and the Levites are to guard it from the outside

-And God makes it clear, if a Levite crosses into the part of the Tabernacle reserved for priests, they will both die

-God tells them all of this to spare them from the wrath He has to pour out on them when they rebel against Him

-God also reiterates how He will care for the Levites and the priests since they will not receive land and will not have cattle or other possessions that provide for them, they have to rely on God for provision

-the other 12 tribes bring a tithe (a tenth of their income) to the Levites

-and from that the Levites give a tithe to God who said it should be given to the priests

-this is God's plan for the provision for everyone

-The Levites are giving of their lives to serve everyone and the people are giving of their tithe to take care of them

## **CH 19 & 20**

-ch 19 we get a few more laws particularly regarding death and being clean afterward

-this is timely, not just because of how many people JUST died, but because of how many who WILL as the older generation dies out before the younger generation can take the land (2 million will be dying?)

A LOT of time passes between ch 19 and ch 20 (roughly 38 years)

-we are almost at the end of their time in the wilderness

-first, a really sad thing happens: Miriam dies (prophetess and highest regarded woman)

-and next, the people encounter another area with no water and they complain...but for many of them, it is likely their first time encountering no water...they were too young or not yet born the last time Israel was tested this way

-even though they have likely inherited their parents' ability to complain (and long for place they don't know or don't remember) their complaint is real, there is no water

\*This leads us to a very sad and fairly hard to understand story in Israel's wilderness wandering

-location: wilderness of Zin (Zin Valley)

-people aren't just complaining, they are rebelling and they are wishing they died  
-then they blame Moses

-Moses and Aaron go to God and God appears and tells them take the staff (the one that budded...that was God's confirmation of them and represented God's authority) assemble the community and as the people watch, speak to the rock

-when they speak to the rock, the rock would provide enough water to satisfy the whole community and their animals

-this should ring familiar, as we have read a very similar story about a rock providing water in Exodus 17 (great study on the parallels between the two stories, some rabbis argue they are variations of the same story)

-Either way, it is clear in Scripture that the Rock in Exodus and in Numbers is a picture of Christ

-how do we know that?

\* **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1 & 4**

-You might remember way back in Exodus we talked about the importance of the rock...it's on a rock that Moses first meets God and later on that same rock Moses meets God again to receive the law.. and later David will (Psalm 18) describe God as a rock

-the water is also important

-the picture is that people could not live without water, just as we can't live without the water of life (also in John 4:13-14 & 7:37-39)

-the imagery of water can be found interwoven in the Bible (in Genesis the flood provides purity and destroys evil and in Exodus we also see water providing the destruction of enemies)

-water is also a type of the Holy Spirit who comes and satisfies our spiritual thirst

-Isaiah 44:3 "for I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants"

-it only when built on the ROCK do we find our spiritual THIRST met

-The biggest contrast between the Exodus and Numbers stories about water from rocks: in Ex God told Moses to strike the rock, but here, God tells Moses to SPEAK to the rock

**-READ NUMBERS 20:9-11**

-Moses obeyed....mostly

-notice where he got it wrong:

-shouted/accused

-must WE bring you water

-struck the rock

-water DID gush out, enough to satisfy everyone

-BUT, Moses and Aaron are punished **READ NU 20:12**

**-What exactly did Moses do that was so wrong?**

-gathers the rebels and then HE becomes the rebel, striking rock TWICE

-what was Moses' occupation before deliverer?

(shepherd)

-what did we learn last week about shepherds?

(A Shepherd's roles are to lead, protect and provide for his sheep...even in a place where provision is scarce

The Shepherd KNOWS the sheep have to:

- o Eat, drink, sleep, rest
- o The Shepherd knows the sheep can't find their way on their own and must be led
- o The Shepherd knows the sheep are weak to elements and predators and must be protected
- o And the Shepherd knows how to find what the sheep need!

-When the Israelites first need water (Ex 17), they need to learn to trust Moses as their shepherd....Moses knows how to find water

-BUT THIS TIME, God has been trying to get Egypt out of his bride

-Now he needs the people to trust HIM

-Not only does Moses lose his cool, he robs the people of the opportunity to see that GOD provides...instead taking this responsibility (and the resulting water) on himself

-this is important....Moses saw himself as the provider here....and God needed him to step aside for the good of his people

-what do we learn? There are consequences for disobedience, God has a reason for his ways, even if we don't understand them

(talk about consequences of losing temper)

- immediately following this incident, the Israelites head toward Edom and send a message asking to pass through the Edomites' land (and offering to pay for any resources along the way)
- who are the Edomites?
  - descendants of Esau (Jacob & Esau, sons of Jacob, son of Abraham)
  - these are closest relatives of Israel
  - Edom says NO...and if you do, it will be an act of war!
- we can't really blame them for not wanting a couple of million people tramping through their land
- but this forces Israel to have to turn around
- sooooo close...
- the people arrive at mount Hor (not currently located though Josephus' writings correlate it with Petra)
- Aaron's participation in the rebellion of his generation resulted in his death here, outside the Promised Land
- Aaron is then succeeded as High Priest by his son Eleazer and Israel mourns for him for 30 days

## **Ch 21**

- The people are still heading toward Canaan, but routing around Edom since they were denied passage
- and they come across another king who takes some of them captive
- they call on God and God heard their cry and gave them victory over these Canaanites
- but as they continue on, the text says they grew impatient with the long journey, and they hit another food and water shortage
- to be clear, they DO have food, they just don't want manna anymore
- and instead of asking God for help, they complain **about** God AND Moses
- They aren't talking TO God, but He hears
- And He sends poisonous snakes among them and "many were bitten and died" ...probably still within his plan to let the older generation die out before entering the land
- the people repent, Moses intercedes and God shows mercy
- this brings us to such a fascinating bit of instruction from God:

**\*READ NU 21:8-9**

WHY??

- God was teaching the people something about faith here

- totally illogical to think that looking at a bronze image could heal
- It took an act of faith in God's plan for anyone to be healed
- the serpent on the stick was a reminder of their sin, which brought their suffering

**-Another question:** How is this not idol worship? How is it different than the golden calf?

- the difference is that the serpent wasn't to be worshipped
- it was pointing to HIM as a symbol of provision and rescue
- this is a heart toward an item

-and there are a few more lessons for us to learn regarding the bronze serpent:

- since the people DID get healed when looking at the serpent, the image was kept for years
- years later the serpent became an object of worship (2 Ki 18:4) showing how easy it is to turn things (even things of God) into idolatry
- we must never worship the tools or the people God chooses to use, but only God alone
- READ John 3:14** this is our authority for making this a type of Christ
- Jesus himself indicated that the bronze serpent was a foreshadowing of Him
- the serpent (symbol of sin and judgment) was lifted up from earth, & put on a tree (symbol of a curse acc to Gal 3:13)
- this lifted up and cursed serpent symbolized Jesus, who takes away Sin from anyone who would look to Him in faith

-ch 21 ends with the people needing to pass through the land of the Amorites, but just as with the king of Edom they are denied passage and these kings come out to fight them

-but the Israelites "slaughter them" and got a LOT of land (modern day Jordan)

-word spreads to the people of Moab and they are afraid

**Ch 22** tells us that as Israel approaches Moab, their king, Balak has an idea: he will hire a guy to cast a "spell" on Israel so they will lose

-notice the similarities between Balak and Pharaoh

- he is afraid of Israel's size/power
- his fear prompts control
- when his efforts are thwarted and he works all the more to control and manipulate

-Balak sends for Balaam (the guy he wants to place a curse on Balak) he's not an Israelite...some form of diviner, but he says first he needs permission from God (Jehovah) v 8

-But God tells Balaam NOT to go with them

-the messengers of Balak return and try to convince Balaam again, but Balaam says he cannot do anything against the will of "the LORD my God" v 18

-this time God gives him permission to go, but with strict instructions to only do what God tells him to do

-the next morning Balaam gets up to go and the text tells us that God is angry (v 22)

### **-What do we make of this?**

-commentators and scholars suggest Balaam's heart is set more on money than obedience

-the book of Jude backs this up saying that Balaam sinned in his greed

-further study reveals a word hidden in the text

-“if”

-some translations (including mine: NLT and NIV) translate that word to “since”

-NASB & ESV use If:

, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but **only** the **word which** I **speak** to you shall you **do**."

-so it could be that Balaam, so eager for money and with the almost permission to go, just gets up and goes

-and here comes one of the most bizarre stories in the Bible:

-The angel of the Lord shows up, but only to Balaam's donkey

-there is a spirit world that God can hide and show at will

-Balaam is beating his donkey who can SEE the spirit realm (imagine being a magician upstaged by your donkey) and then the donkey TALKS

-likely this was not the donkey talking and reasoning, it was God speaking through the donkey

-I like that Balaam talks to his donkey for a bit...like it's no big

-Then Balaam's eyes are also opened and he sees the angel of the LORD, bringing Balaam to repentance and willingness to turn around if God desires him to

-some call this a Christophany, but that would be confusing to say "the LORD opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel of the LORD"

(angel=messenger or sent one) LORD here is Jehovah



-God again says “go” as his intention always to bless Israel

\*We move into the home stretch now, chapters **23, 24 & 25**

-Balak is irritated it took Balaam so long to arrive

-Balaam reminds Balak that he can only say what God puts in his mouth

-Balak follows ancient Canaanite ways: sacrificing cattle and sheep and truly believing that a spoken curse had power

-remember this is all because Balak is afraid that Israel will defeat him and take his land

-Instead of delivering a curse, Balaam delivers a blessing..in 23:9 he references Israel’s set apartness

-calling them a people dwelling alone

-Balak is unhappy...and drives again for a curse

-Balaam cannot curse and instead blesses Israel again stating that God is with them as their king

-Balak says if you don’t have anything BAD to say, don’t say anything! (if God only gives you blessings don’t say them out loud)

-at a third request for a curse, Balaam is the one who realizes that God is “determined to bless Israel” (24:1)

-the Spirit of the Lord came on him (God used him in spite of who he was) and he delivers another blessing, an elaborate blessing

-this one ends with an exact phrase said by God to Abraham nearly 700 years earlier: “blessed are those who bless you and cursed are those who curse you” (Gen 12:3)

-this means the curse is about to turn back on Balak

-Balak flies into a rage saying I paid you to curse and instead you have blessed three times!

-Balaam reminds him he told him he could only say what the Lord told him to say, but before he goes (without pay!) he stops to tell Balak what God says Israel will do to Balak and his people in the future

-Had Balaam stopped here, with these words/visions from God he would have been fine....safe even.. but though it is not spelled out here in the text, it is spelled out in just a couple of chapters (Nu 31:16)

*These are the very ones who followed Balaam’s advice and caused the people of Israel to rebel against the Lord at Mount Peor*

Scholars assert that Balaam told Balak how to ultimately defeat Israel: send Moabite women to the Israelite camp

-ch 25 describes that some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with these Moabite women and the women then invite the men to attend sacrifices to their gods

-and the men do....they feast and celebrate and worship the gods of Moab...including Chemosh (pronounced Key-mosh)(also likely Molech to surrounding cultures) a god who required child sacrifice and Baal

-even though Balaam is behind this, Israel is responsible for their sin

-God commands that the chiefs be executed first

-and then Moses orders Israel's judges to put to death the men under their own authority who have joined in the worship of Baal

-just then an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman into his tent right before the eyes of Moses and all of the people as they are weeping in front of the Tabernacle (we will see in vv. 14-15 that these two were an Israelite chief and the daughter of a Midianite chief)...this was belligerent, shameless, arrogant sin

-Phinehas, son of Eleazar (grandson of Aaron) immediately jumped up, took his spear and ran into the tent, taking a definite stand against compromise, he thrusts his spear through both bodies at once

-it is here that the text tells us that this is what stopped a plague...but not before TWENTY FOUR THOUSAND people had died (here we have the word *eleph* again)

-God honors Phinehas for his righteous anger that purified Israel...his descendants are given a right to the priesthood permanently

-We, like Phinehas, need to courageously stand for the separation and holiness of God's people

-then God has his people destroy all of Midian...sadly God's people cannot be trusted to be faithful to him...the hearts turn aside to false gods

\*God wants more for them, and for us\*