

# The Compass

Week 10

OT Readings – Numbers 4:1-16:40

NT Readings – Mark 12:18-15:47

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- The materials of Num. 4-10 are foreign to us, but would have made complete sense to them.<sup>1</sup> Don't get lost in the details; a good introductory commentary can help here.<sup>2</sup>
- Num. 10:11 marks leaving Sinai and beginning the journey to the Promised Land.
- 11:16-30. Moses is overwhelmed with the attitude and resistance of the people. God gives him aid through seventy elders upon whom the Spirit comes to equip them. Num. 11:29 ties closely with Acts 2 at Pentecost and 1 Cor. 14 where Paul gives instruction on prophesying.
- 13-14. The rebellion of the first generation commits them to wander and die in the wilderness. Notice the running theme of complaint and resistance to God. (Num. 11-12 & 16)

### New Testament

- Final confrontations with the religious leaders leave them with nothing else to say. (12:34) Jesus pronounces the doom of the existing temple and all it represents, though it pains Him – He longed for it to be otherwise. (13:1-2. Luke 19:41-44.<sup>3</sup>)
- Mark 13. While there is great debate on the particulars of the “end,” Jesus seems to have in mind the events surrounding the destruction of the city and temple. (13:1-2) It will take place in “this generation.” (13:31) Yet, the exact timing is known only to the Father. (13:32)
- Events move forward quickly; the last supper, Gethsemane, arrest, disciple's betrayals, Pilate & people's rejection, crucifixion and burial. If we could read the story for the first time, without any knowledge of the events, how would it impact us?!<sup>4</sup> Try doing so.

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Mark 12:38-44. Jesus stingingly rebukes the religious of His day; those who use God and religion for their own selfish ends, to benefit themselves. Apparently some were even getting rich at it, “cheating widows out of their property.” Religious charlatanry isn't new. (12:38-40)

Jesus sat opposite the temple treasury, watching the parade of people as they brought their gifts. The rich came, no doubt with appropriate pomp, to put their large and “extravagant” gifts into the treasury, impressing the audience. In contrast, the widow offers her two copper coins.<sup>5</sup> Who would bother to notice? (12:41-44)

God. God did. God does. God is not so busy running the universe to *notice*. **He sees.** His standard of measure, His evaluation of things is so radically different than ours. (Luke 16:15) God was *impressed* by an old poor widow, overlooked and ignored by others. He saw her heart and He was impressed. We might feel that we have so little to offer that it doesn't really matter after all. So many others have so much more – more talent, more gifts, more everything. But remember what kind of God He is, this One you love and serve. He sees you and He loves you – you matter. What you offer to Him, if it's with all your heart, it matters. He's impressed!

**Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”**

Numbers 13-14. How do you see the circumstances of your life? While all twelve spies looked at the same circumstances, two saw something the others did not - GOD. (13:25-33) In the end, the negative report of the ten prevailed with the people and a whole generation lost their destiny. These chapters are two of the saddest in the whole Bible. After all God had done for them and what they had seen, how could this have been their reaction?

Joshua & Caleb<sup>6</sup> alone survived that generation and entered the land, because they had a “different attitude.”<sup>7</sup> They too saw the fortified cities, the giants; they surely felt the fear that went with such a sight. But they knew that what they saw was not the final reality; circumstance would not have the final word. It becomes critical to understand *why* this was so. Their positive “vision” of things did not come upon them suddenly, at the last moment; it was cultivated over time in their relationship with God. They knew God! The whole of their lives, all matters big and small, were seen with God fully in view. And when the moment came, of *opportunity* and of challenge, they simply expressed the faith that had already been growing in their hearts. What about us?

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### Mark 15:34. Q. When Jesus was on the cross, was He deserted by the Father?

We must walk reverently and cautiously when we explore these final moments on the cross. The details are not revealed to us in Scripture, perhaps we could not really stand the trauma of knowing? The physical sufferings of scourging and crucifixion we know about though can hardly understand. Emotionally He suffered rejection, mocking and a sense of abandonment by those He had loved the most. But what transpired in the final three hours, what “spiritual” sufferings? Seemingly these sufferings began in the garden as He began to take upon Himself the world’s sin; He sweat drops of blood from the stress that such put upon Him.<sup>8</sup>

Probably Jesus’ cry is in Aramaic and is a quotation of Ps. 22, a psalm of David where David finds himself helpless before his enemies and wonders where God is. Yet, the Psalm ends with a note of triumph, God hears.

What does it mean? Why would Jesus say this? While it certainly reflects Jesus’ perception of His experience, that He felt helpless or abandoned; was He really? If we mean that there was a *real* separation between the Trinity, then I think not. Rather it may mean that the profound suffering over the world’s sin is something Jesus must do alone, hence His awareness of helplessness.<sup>9</sup> There is an essential unity of heart and purpose among the Godhead; they suffer together over the rejection, indifference and sin of humanity. While Jesus is the focal point of this suffering, it seems reasonable to assume that the Trinity suffers with Jesus in these moments.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Again, it helps to remember that God must work with people where they are and that He uses what is available in their culture situation as a means to teach truth. Cross-cultural missionaries utilize this principle as they enter into the cultural situation of any particular people group. They seek to understand how that culture “works” and then present truth in that context. Often there are what is called “redemptive analogies,” places in the culture where God has already been at work and which can be used to “connect” God’s truth with that particular group. Don Richardson tells some amazing stories of these redemptive analogies in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*. The Bible is a missional document. It shows how God has interacted with our world, beginning where we are, and through relationship with us He has given revelation of Who He is and of truth.

<sup>2</sup> For a basic introductory commentary on Numbers, find Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Here is one of the few NT references to Jesus showing strong emotion, though no doubt He did on other occasions. His weeping reflected the grief of God. All that God had wanted for His people they have rejected, they have pushed Him out of their lives and now they face the consequences of life without Him.

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<sup>4</sup> The great “reversal” from the people’s hailing Him as king to calling for His death seems incomprehensible. How could they have treated Him this way? He ministered to them over a period of three years – healed the sick, delivered from the demonic, showed compassion and revealed God’s heart. He did not fit their consumeristic agenda; and when that became clear they killed Him. (Jn. 6:26-71) How consumeristic are we?

<sup>5</sup> 1/64 of a days wages, a few dollars at best by today’s reckoning.

<sup>6</sup> Joshua’s later history is well known. Caleb’s less so, but interesting. Watch for him in Numbers and Joshua.

<sup>7</sup> Forty-five years later Caleb recounts his return from spying, “I brought word back...as it was in my *heart*.” (NAU, my emphasis) He saw things through God’s eyes.

<sup>8</sup> This is an opinion. Apparently this suffering was suspended and an angel ministered to Him (Luke 22:43) so that He wouldn’t die in the garden and therefore not make it to the cross itself.

<sup>9</sup> Gould, *Mark, ICC*, 294. Gould sees Jesus’ quotation of the Psalm to reflect Jesus’ sense of helplessness in His situation, but not necessarily a real separation from God.

<sup>10</sup> There are many views of Jesus death on the cross/atonement and its meaning. While no one view captures every nuance of this profound event, there is a need to try to make sense of the atonement theme that runs throughout the Bible. See Greg Boyd, *Across the Spectrum*, 113-131, for a description of several historical options. Personally, I am favorable to the Governmental View. God in Jesus reveals His grief over and hatred for sin; but also His incredible love for sinners and desire to show mercy. God did not “punish” Jesus for our sin; nor was He angry before the cross and then merciful after. I believe the Governmental View allows us to maintain that essential unity of the Godhead in heart, mind and purpose.