

The Compass

Week 11

OT Readings – Numbers 16:41-28:15

NT Readings – Mark 16:1-Luke 3:22

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Numbers 22 finds Israel camped on the plains of Moab opposite Jericho; from here they will cross into the Promised Land. Moses' final words to the people¹ take place here, as well as his death. Num. 33 reviews the journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab.
- Transitions & preparations take place as Israel readies to enter the land; leadership transfers to Joshua, the rebellious first generation dies out (including Miriam and Aaron), census of the second generation.
- God patiently endures the continual complaining and betrayal (e.g., 21:5, 25:1-9), though not without consequence to the rebellious.²
- The Balaam story comprises several chapters including the odd incident of the talking donkey.³ Why is Balaam included? Seemingly as a reminder of God's mercy to His people and commitment to bless them, even to the point of using a pagan prophet. (Num. 23:19-20, 25-26.) Note how this blessing through Balaam is followed immediately with the story of Israel's betrayal in Num. 25.⁴

New Testament

- Mark concludes with an account of the resurrection. While we give much emphasis to Jesus' death and rightfully so, it is His resurrection that marks His victory and our incredible hope!⁵
- Remember that Luke is part one of a two part story, Luke-Acts; compare the prefaces in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2.⁶ Also, see "How To Read Luke".
- Luke puts great emphasis on Jesus' fulfillment of the OT hope in bringing salvation to Israel. Watch for the prophetic words through Anna, Simeon, Zechariah, etc. What do these tell you about Luke's concerns? Acts continues the salvation theme by showing that salvation is also for the Gentiles, thus salvation is for all.
- Lots of interesting details not included in the other Gospels: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, Simeon, Jesus at twelve years old in the temple, etc.
- Pay close attention to the Holy Spirit's role, Acts will continue His part in the story. (Luke 1:41, 1:67, 4:1, etc. Acts 1:8, 2:4, etc.)

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Death seems an unconquerable foe. No one escapes it, everyone finally succumbs. People live in the dread of it, even if no one ever talks about it. (Heb. 2:14-15) Jesus died. He didn't swoon or fall into a coma, He DIED. (Mark 15:44-46) He entered into our space and fully embraced our experience, even death. Why? So that death would never again have the final word.

We are often way too casual about the resurrection. Perhaps as believers we have been through too many Easter seasons without reflecting on the absolute craziness of what has taken place – a very dead Jesus is now alive. Have you stopped to consider how insane that is? His disciples couldn't believe it. (Mark 16:9-11)

God's victory over death is complete, the tomb really is empty, the deed is done and death can only whimper.

Amazingly, this victory is to be ours! (1 Cor. 15:50-58) God has not simply opened a way to heaven. In fact, that is not the emphasis of the NT. The emphasis is LIFE, life in the present, bodily resurrection life in the future. It is because we live in this great hope that we can have such confidence in life and in the face of death. No wonder the early Christians went to their deaths singing! GOD has brought all this about for us, not because He owes us and certainly not because

we deserve it. All only because He loves us, and amazingly, longs to spend an eternity with us. Who cannot but “take off their hat in wonder!”

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

Luke 2:25-35. This weeks readings in Luke are filled with references to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who were living faithful to God – and this all *before* Jesus and the Spirit’s coming in Acts.

I liked old Simeon the first time I read about him. Deeply attached and connected to God, he lived with a burning passion in his heart and a dream which consumed his life. Day by day he went to the temple and day by day he waited. But he *knew* what God had said and he *knew* the OT God - the God who was ever faithful to His word and people. As he waited, “the Holy Spirit was upon him...the Spirit led him...” (Luke 2:25-27) Then he saw Joseph, Mary and the baby! He took the Dream God had spoken into his heart into his arms and he saw the Faithfulness of God in human flesh. The only thing he could do was worship! Simeon was faithful against all odds and played his part in the Story. How would you like to have your claim to fame be that you prophesied over Jesus and got your story in the Bible!

What has God whispered into your heart? What inflames your passion? What is rooted so deeply in your heart that you cling to it against all odds? Make sure of this – that it is something GOD has given you, not some selfish or self-centered wish. But if it is God, then hold on tight - you *will* play your part, *will* fulfill your place in God’s purposes. There are empty pages in this grand God-Story that belong to you – ones which you and you alone must fill.

Difficult Question of the Week

Numbers 20:8-13. Q. “Why did God forbid Moses enter the Promised Land because of this seemingly minor incident?” Sin of any and every kind is a serious matter and should never be considered lightly. In this incident, several things must be considered. Moses deliberately disobeys⁷ God by not doing what God asks in the *way* God asks. Moses’ actions toward God are of the same sort as those of the first generation that died in the wilderness – rebellion. (Num. 14) Equally important is Moses’ place as a mediator-leader who both represents God to the people and the people to God. Moses’ attitude toward the people indicates he has lost his heart for them, “you rebels.” His actions undermined both God’s confidence and the people’s confidence. Finally, in his rashness, he lays claim to the power to bring forth water, something obviously only God could do.

Does God love Moses less? I think not. God is faced with a “governmental” problem; Moses actions are public. If God shows no concern for Moses’ actions, God undermines His own place as God to Israel because Moses as God’s representative did not “demonstrate His holiness.” (20:12) I believe it greatly disappointed God to set Moses aside, but it became absolute necessary as part of the larger concerns of moving Israel forward as *His* people into their destiny. How significant are our choices! We are His representatives to a watching world. (2 Cor. 5:18-20) Let us take care to do that well.

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¹ Deuteronomy.

² While God’s actions might seem harsh, one must ask, “What options does He have given the situation?” The guilty receive punishment in these accounts, not the innocent. Interestingly, in the account of Korah’s rebellion in Num. 16, only the guilty adults are punished, not every person. How do we know this? Because Korah’s descendents will write Psalms that find a place in Scripture; note Psalm 49 in your readings this week! The principle of Ezek. 18 is God’s standard – only the guilty are to be dealt with, every person will die for their own sin; not the children for the parents. The worship of Baal of Peor (likely involving ritual prostitution with Moabite women) was brazen (Num. 25:6-8) and if left unchecked would have threatened the whole God-Israel relationship. It is this type of idolatry which will plague Israel throughout her history. God experienced it as adultery against Him.

³ Perhaps this is not so strange if you’ve watch Shrek 😊. Balaam was a “super-prophet” for hire. Balaam seems a positive character in the Numbers narrative, but he is not so positively portrayed later in Scripture. Perhaps we need to see the parallel between Balaam and his donkey – Balaam’s character and methods are highly questionable, but if God can speak through a donkey, He can speak through Balaam!

⁴ How great is the contrast of God’s love and grace (via Balaam) and the people’s betrayals and sinfulness.

⁵ Rom. 1:4. 1 Cor. 15:12-19, 50-58. Etc.

⁶ Like all historians, Luke is selective in what he tells according to his interests and concerns (of course God's). It is helpful to ask as you read, "Why has Luke chosen to include these stories, details, etc.?" and "Why has he put them in this order, told the story in this way?"

⁷ See Num. 27:12-14.