

The Compass

Week 12

OT Readings – Numbers 28:16-Deuteronomy 4:49

NT Readings – Luke 3:23-7:10

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- These final chapters of Numbers contain various laws and regulations about offerings, cities of refuge, festivals, inheritance, cities for the Levites.¹
- Num. 33 traces geographically the journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab.
- Pay attention to Num. 33:50-56. This appears to be God's policy in reference to the Promised Land's inhabitants. On the destruction of the Midianites (Num 31), see below.
- Deut. 1-4 are introductory to the remainder of Deuteronomy. On Deuteronomy, see "How To Read Deuteronomy." Moses recounts God and Israel's shared history up to this moment (1-3) and then in chapter 4 introduces the exhortation that will comprise the rest of the book. As you read, what is it that Moses highlights about God, God's people and their relationship? Why, what is his purpose in doing so?

New Testament

- Jesus, filled with the Spirit (3:21-22, 4:1), is tempted by the devil in the wilderness and then begins His public ministry in Galilee.
- Luke 4:43 is the reason why Jesus came according to Jesus. Look back to 4:14-21 to understand how this mission fits with the OT as well as how it will be expressed through Jesus' life.²
- As in the other Gospel accounts, we see both the compassion and power of God expressed through Jesus to meet the pressing and seemingly impossible needs of those gathered around Him. As we reflect on those difficult OT passages (e.g., Numbers 31), we must consider that this Jesus was the clearest representation, picture, of what God is really like. (John 14:7-9. Heb. 1:1-3)

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Deut. 1:26-33. Perspective is everything. In Deuteronomy we get perspective through Moses on the past events which transpired between God and His people. "God carried you, as a man carries his son..." (1:31 NASU) reveals God's tender care and concern as He brought them out of Egypt. He went ahead of them on the journey seeking the best places for them to camp; He led them with the pillar of fire and cloud. Their response? They rebelled, sought to go back to Egypt, and forfeited their destiny.³ God is tender toward us, concerned for the details of our lives. Do we have eyes to see Him? (Matt. 6:25-34)

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Luke 5:27-32 with 6:37. For myself, I must be on constant guard against becoming judgmental. While I blame it on my gift mix (teacher-prophet), God always, simply and directly, addresses my heart, attitude and actions! Judgmentalism is a constant, subtle danger for us. Our responsibility to discern about right and wrong⁴ so quickly turns into comparison and then self-righteousness, "I'm not like *them*." In Luke 5:27-32, we see the inevitable consequences of our slide into religious judgment. "Why do your disciples eat and drink with scum?" charge the self-righteously religious. So right in their own minds, they could not see the sick and hurting around them. They had created "categories" of people, those not worthy of God's grace and mercy, those deserving judgment and justice. How are we doing? Here are some questions to help us think.

- Is there anyone that you just look past or look through when you see them?

- Are there people you have “written off” because you think there is no hope for them (nor do you think they deserve any)?
- Are there any categories of people that simply the thought of them brings an instant negative reaction? How about “liberals” or maybe “conservatives” (depending on which *you* are)? Homosexuals? Prostitutes? Homeless? Drug dealers? Atheists? Muslims? People with AIDs/STDs? The list could go on and on.

What *should* be our response? People are not categories, they are real *persons*. Jesus came to bring healing and wholeness to those who needed a physician. He *knew* they were sinners and that they were responsible and that perhaps much was “self-inflicted.” He knew they needed to repent. Yet, He expressed God’s loving heart toward them.⁵

Does this mean we condone sin? Did Jesus? People are valuable because they are made in His image, because He loves them, because redemption is the why of the kingdom. We can love people and not agree with or condone their sin. Are you open to others, *all* of them? Those with whom you disagree? Can you be a channel of God’s grace and love?

Difficult Question of the Week

Numbers 31. Q. How are we to understand the destruction of the Midianites?

Of the difficult issues raised in reading the OT, those passages that detail the annihilation or slaughter of certain people groups are the most troubling and disturbing.⁶ Note a few things:

- Such “genocidal” actions were not universally applied in the OT narrative, but very restricted to certain situations and time periods.⁷ These incidents seem exceptional and are not God’s overarching policy toward the inhabitants of the Promised Land. See Numbers 33:50-56.
- God must deal with reality as it is. War was a reality in the ANE; if Israel had not fought she would have been annihilated.
- Even when the text seems to indicate that everyone was killed that is not always the case; the Midianites reappear later in the Bible (Judges 6-8), also true of the Amalekites. It is possible in some instances that a legitimate form of exaggeration is being employed.⁸

We will look again at this issue in Joshua. However, again, these cases seem exceptional and restricted to certain Canaanite people groups. God gives specific rules concerning waging war (Deut. 20) and these rules are quite restrained in the dealing with conquered enemies given the cruelty and barbarism of the ANE.⁹

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¹ The Levites did not inherit any land in the Promised Land. These cities provided a place for them to live.

² It is interesting to consider how we might answer the question, “Why did Jesus come?” To die for humanity, to reveal the Father, to show compassion, etc. and all would be true. Yet, we often miss the overarching purpose for all of these things; Jesus came to declare, demonstrate and establish the kingdom of God. All that He does must be tied directly to His own stated life purpose (4:43).

³ Stephen comments on these events in Acts 7:39, “they returned to Egypt *in their hearts...*” What a sad indictment and a pertinent, powerful warning for us in the present: it *always* begins in our heart. (Prov. 4:23)

⁴ Any attempt to discern or evaluate good and evil, right and wrong is a troubling idea to those committed to a PC culture, “You’re judging me.” Yet, Paul requires discernment within the Body and constant self-evaluation as we allow the Holy Spirit access to our heart and life. (1 Cor. 5:12-13. Also, Heb. 5:13-14.) The issue of “judging,” Biblically speaking is about not taking the place of God in the lives of others and living in absolute honesty (= humility) about ourselves. In this context and in the verses that follow, Jesus talks about our need to be merciful as God is merciful and to remove the log in our own eye before we tackle the speck in our brother’s. How often do we get that turned around!

⁵ Rom. 2:4, “the kindness of God leads us to repentance.”

⁶ Again, I would recommend, Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker Books, 2010)

⁷ The standard answer to the annihilation question has involved two primary understandings: 1. The Canaanites were extraordinarily wicked and were a danger to other peoples with whom they had contact. A crude analogy is the need to destroy a diseased animal to save the rest of the herd. 2. If left in the land they would surely corrupt God’s people and lead them into idolatry. Later Biblical history will prove this danger all too real; we already saw this possible danger with the Midianite incident in Numbers 25. God must deal in reality and the Bible does indicate that it is possible for people groups in the OT period to morally cross the “point of no return.” Only God can know when

such a point is reached and such actions are God's last resort. Yet, His mercy knows nearly no bounds. Read Gen. 15:16 (a reference to the Amorites of Canaan) – their sin was not yet “full,” God was still hopeful for repentance and change. Gen. 15:16 is a word to Abraham four hundred years before Israel enters the land and wages war.

⁸ It would be like us saying, “Wow, we really destroyed their basketball team, we annihilated them” when we mean that we had a decisive victory. A legitimate interpretive question to ask is this, “How much of what we read in the telling of these events is the human part/side of the God-human interaction that makes up the narrative portions of the Bible?”

⁹ For example, with reference to the Midianite virgins “given” to Israelite soldiers – this was not to be rape and abuse as the spoils of war. Israelite males must take these women as their *wives* and treat them respectfully. (Deut. 21:10-14)