

The Compass

Week 15

OT Readings – Deuteronomy 33:1-Joshua 12:24

NT Readings – Luke 13:1-17:37

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moses and the transfer of leadership to Joshua.
- The miraculous crossing of the Jordan at flood stage. More than a reminder of God's power, it is reminiscent to Israel's Red Sea crossing in the exodus. The second generation now has its own history with God.
- The *interactivity* of God and Israel in the conquest of the land. Often God directs and acts, but at times the strategy is left with Israel, e.g., attack on Ai.
- The repeated term "completely destroyed" (e.g., Josh. 11:11) is "to put under the ban" or "complete devote to God." It involved a complete dedication of something to God, sometimes by destruction. See "Difficult Question" below.
- The conquest is first to the south and then the north of Canaan. Joshua 12 summarizes the conquest – what kings and where.¹

New Testament

- Note that we are still in the "on the way to Jerusalem" section of Luke's telling of ~~the~~ Jesus' story. See "How to Read Luke."
- Intermix of teaching/parables along with Jesus' compassion and healing of the broken, sick and oppressed. Several important kingdom parables are in this section.²
- Conflict with the religious leaders and Pharisees. Watch for the contrast of how Jesus sees (reveals) God and how the Pharisees understand who God is. How is your understanding of God challenged by Jesus?
- This week's readings are a goldmine of truth and insight. As God reveals something specific to you, take time to reflect on and meditate on it. Meditation allows us to focus on truth and let the Holy Spirit root it deeply into our hearts and minds.³

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Luke 15:11-32. The parable of the prodigal son is well known to us and for this reason must be read with fresh eyes.⁴ The father in the story has two sons, the younger of which demands his share of the inheritance *now*,⁵ only to party it all away. Poverty-stricken, he lowers himself to feeding pigs. In his destitution, the younger son "came to his senses" and turns toward home. The story is gripping. How will the father react?

The prodigal's father sees him coming from a long way off. The father's vigil has been constant; his pain-filled longing and waiting, his ever hope-filled expectation of return. The elderly father rushes from the house, running⁶ down the path and sweeps up into his arms the dirty, sinful son who has disgraced and rejected him. No hint of retribution, no "I told you so," no waiting first for an apology, no expectation to pay back the money. Then he throws a party!

"Father" as a picture for God can be difficult for ~~some, some~~; perhaps this is true of you. But notice – God the Father is like the prodigal's father; filled with compassion, embarrassing in his mercy, overflowing with love, and yes, *affection*. Can you see Him? Can you picture Him rushing to you in your worst moments, in your mess and your shame? Can you see the anxious longing in His face and eyes as He watched eagerly for *your* return?⁷

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

Joshua 4. God commanded Israel to take stones from the riverbed and to erect a monument with these stones west of the Jordan, the Promised Land side. These stones were to serve as a reminder to generations to come that “God’s hand is powerful” and that He should be “feared (reverenced) forever.” (4:21-24) But they were only a reminder. Only a way to recall the fact that God is alive and He does new and amazing things in every generation. Each new generation must discover the truth of the living God for themselves. To *touch* the monument and recall the past is not the same as *grabbing hold of the living God for ourselves* and experiencing His life, love and power in our lives and generation.

What kind of God do you believe in? Is He alive in your life? The history of God’s people is filled with testimony to the reality of His love, power and life. Are we content to hear the stories of the past or do those stories stir and then fuel in us a raging discontent that will not rest until we know Him for ourselves, *experience* Him for ourselves?⁸

Difficult Question of the Week

Joshua 6:15-21. Q. “What are we to make of the “complete destruction” of whole cities and peoples?”

The actions taken by Israel in completely destroying whole cities and peoples is very troubling to modern readers. There is a repeated use of the term “herem,” which the NLT translates “completely destroyed as an offering to the Lord.” (Joshua 6:17) It is a description of the conquest exercised toward some of the Canaanite cities. The question is whether this was intended and practiced as a policy of annihilation. There may well be more to the story. Here are some possible considerations:⁹

- It is possible that the language used to describe the conquest is hyperbole, consistent with the literary conventions of the day; total defeat, not literally the death of all persons is in mind.¹⁰ This was the stereotypical language of warfare in the ANE, “we won a decisive victory.” (Joshua 6:21. 8:25.) Also, Joshua “utterly destroyed” the Anakim from the land of Israel, yet some still remained which Caleb needed to deal with later. (Josh. 11:21-22. 15:13-14.) How does this impact our understanding of herem?
- The ultimate objective was to drive out the Canaanites, to dispose of them of their land and destroy their idolatrous cultures; not necessarily kill every person. (Deut. 7:1-5.)¹¹
- The herem or ban applied only to specific situations and allowed for, perhaps even hoped for, exceptions. Rahab and her family and the Gibeonites were under the “ban” (herem), yet they were not annihilated. Why not? Could such “exceptions” help us to better understand the policy itself?
- It is possible that the ban’s execution may have applied to combatants only.

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¹ Canaan was comprised of many separate city-states governed by individual kings; no major power held sway over the whole region in this time period.

² For help with understanding parables, see chapter eight of Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, 3rd edition.

³ Christian meditation, of course, is not some kind of Eastern religious mind control technique. We are not “emptying” our minds, rather in Christian meditation we are filling our minds with truth and asking the Holy Spirit to make it relevant, real and applicable to our life situation. For help with “how to” do Christian meditation, check out the book, *An Appointment with the King* by Joel Comiskey. Comiskey’s book is helpful in developing a daily time with God. Another book on spiritual disciplines is the Richard Foster classic, *Celebration of Discipline*.

⁴ The purpose of this parable along with the other two closely related parables in this context is to be found in the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who complained against Jesus’ association with “sinners.” Jesus uses these three stories to illustrate heaven’s quite different attitude toward sinners.

⁵ The inference of this demand is that the younger son wished the father to be dead.

⁶ The father would have needed to pull his robe up around his waist to run. His actions would have been shameful and embarrassing for someone of his status in his time and culture. He cares not at all! His son has returned!

⁷ Jesus masterfully weaves together several lessons in this one story. The younger son knew the father and knew the father’s heart. The elder son did not. He saw the father as a difficult task-master, “All these years I have slaved for you.” (15:28) How do you see your service to your Father in heaven? It is a duty or a joy?

⁸ The sad commentary of Judges 2:10 is that the next generation of Israel were content with the past stories and never came to know Him for themselves. Take time and reflect on the following. Do you know Him yourself or have you been content with the testimony of others?

The Explorer

The explorer returned to his people who ~~were eager~~~~were eager~~ to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw the exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forest; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids. He said, "Go and find out for yourselves." To guide them he drew a map of the river. They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their town hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the river, for did they not know its' every turn and bend, how broad it was and how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls? (Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*)

⁹ For more detail see, Paul Copan, *Is God A Moral Monster?* (Baker, 2011)

¹⁰ If this is true, then Joshua's conquest accomplished what Moses intended – and that was not a wholesale annihilation. (Joshua 11:12, 14-15, 20.)

¹¹ Deut. 7:1-5 is enlightening. If the plan was to annihilate the Canaanite peoples, how could they intermarry with them? Why the concern about, "intermarriage?"