

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Dec. 3, 2017

This Sunday, Dec. 3rd, your readings should be Day 71: Chapters 7 of Numbers, Psalm 73, and Acts 10:1-23.

This is a first warning or blessing, there will be no class on 12/24 or 12/31. You will have two weeks of or to catch-up.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 6: The first half of this short chapter is about the first deacons. Notice the ordination was by the laying on of hands. Paul talks about laying hands on Timothy to make him a bishop. This was not a simple servant job, but truly meant to be an ordination.

The second half of the chapter is the beginning of the story of the first martyr, Stephen.

Acts 7: Stephen gives a great summary of God's work with the people to save them. He mentions that Moses was forty when he killed the man. Forty years later he saw the burning bush. And we know that he spent forty years in the desert. In vs. 55-56 we hear an account of the first near-death experience: "But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 8: Now we are introduced to Saul who will become Paul. Everyone hid except the apostles, vs. 1. They had hidden on Good Friday and were over their fear. Philip does miracles in Samaria and in vs. 13 Simon the Magician starts to believe because of Philip. In vs. 14-17 we have the beginnings of Confirmation. Obviously Simon did not have pure motives at first but ending up proving himself. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is really awesome.

Acts 9: The conversion of Saul is interesting. There is no mention of him on a horse, so he wasn't really knocked off his high horse. Having his name, Saul, mentioned twice by Jesus is a sign. King Saul tried to kill David the Anointed One. This would not have gone past Saul. Vs. 18-19 are the cure of blindness and baptism. It is important that it was in this order. Saul starts preaching about Jesus right in Damascus but then after a long time (vs. 23) he wore out his welcome and had to escape in a basket, vs. 25. In Jerusalem they have not yet gotten to the point of trusting Saul and so feared him. So Barnabas had to vouch for him.

Vs. 31 shows that the church is at peace and growing. Peter is in Joppa a seaport town west of Jerusalem by the Mediterranean Sea. This is also where Jonah ended up when the whale spit him out.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Psalm 66: This psalm sounds like Jesus is trying to rally the troops, encouraging them to praise the Father. Vs. 6b: "Therefore let us rejoice in him who rules by might forever..." I personally don't know what burnt offerings or holocausts He brings to the house of the Lord so I'm not sure of vs. 13-15. This is what King David did. Jesus was a sacrifice Himself but was not burned, so it is one of the few times it doesn't connect perfectly as a prayer of Jesus.

Psalm 67: A psalm of praise and petition in which Jesus is praying for us.

Psalm 68: This long psalm is about God's actions with us. I love vs. 6: "Father of the fatherless, defender of widows; this is the God who abode is holy who give a home to the forsaken, who leads prisoners out to prosperity, while rebels live in the desert." Vs. 21, "Our God is a God who saves; escape from death is in the Lord's hands." Vs. 29-32 are prayers of petition and vs. 33-36 are prayers of praise.

Psalm 69: This is a prayer of Jesus but He is not drowning in vs. 1, "Save me, God, for the waters have reached my neck." These waters are the waters that symbolize chaos, that are described in Gen. 1:1. Vs. 10 is what is quoted in John 2:17, "His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Vs. 22 foreshadows Mt. 27:34, "They gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall." But notice vs. 29, "Strike them from the book of the living; do not count them among the just!" This is different than "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." (Lk 23:34) But then the footnote I have for that verse in the Gospel of Luke is that this part of the verse does not appear in the earliest Gospel manuscripts. What that would mean would be that some will not be going to heaven. "Father forgive them...", might also just be referring to some who do not understand, like some of the crowd. The hard-heartedness of the High Priests might be another matter.

Psalm 70: A short prayer of Jesus during His passion.

Psalm 71: Twice the psalm mentions old age (vs. 9 + 18). Back then the average lifespan was between 30, Jesus might have felt like an elder at 33 as He was nearing the end of His death. But like many of these psalms, this is a prayer that most of us can all relate to. Vs. 6, "On you I depend since birth; from my mother's womb you are my strength;" seems to foretell that Mary was sinless or Jesus would not have been able to depend on her, but it also reminds us that life begins at conception. Vs. 9, "Do not cast me aside in my old age; as my strength fails, do not forsake me. This is the prayer for God's help and the answer to this prayer is summarized in Lk. 1:46-55, the Magnificat. That is where we hear the words of praise from Mary who feels that God has answered all the requests of this psalm.

Psalm 72: This psalm of petition to the Lord to help the king and the king's sons as is Jesus asking for help for Himself and for His spiritual family. He asks that as king, He was visited by the kings of the East, like Tarshish, Arabia and Seba, who would offer gifts. (vs. 10 + 15) This mentions gold but does not name the other gifts. Three countries might be a reason for thinking there were three kings. Jesus would have been praying this before His birth?

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Lev. 21: Vs. 9 about a priest's daughter being burned to death for dishonoring her father by fornication and shows why preacher's kids have such a hard time. The section, vs. 18-21, on human irregularities is about who can be an active priest. The Church still works with this. St. Isaac Jogues had his hands disfigured by Indians who saw him as an enemy. He had to have special permission from Rome to be able to say Mass after that. Notice that it is not saying they are evil in any way. They simply cannot represent the People of God as a priest unless they are cleared.

Lev. 22: Vs. 4, “if anyone has had an emission of seed,” is another reminder of the concern of fluids but also of the strictness of keeping things as perfect as possible. Vs. 5 mentions touching a “swarming creature.” I imagine this primarily refers to locusts which could be carriers of disease. So much of this is a reminder that we much offer the best to God. I think of the silly notion of “Fr. What-a-Waste.” As if God would be happy if we just had priests who couldn’t get a date to serve Him. Just realize that if eating sacred food is limited in this way in the OT, that in the NT it is serious when Paul warns us not to eat the Body of Christ unworthily, without confession.

Lev. 23: Vs. 15 mentions Pentecost. The apostles received the Holy Spirit on this holyday. The Feast of Booths (or makeshift tents) celebrates the harvest. Vs. 11 mentions that the priest “shall wave the sheaf.” It took me a long time to understand what this could mean until I thought about doing it. If you wave a sheaf of grain the seed will be all over and basically impossible to retrieve. That is a good sign that it is for God only. Vs. 40 says that waving branches from majestic trees is a good way to show your happiness to the Lord. Think Palm Sunday.

Lev. 24: Vs. 4, “the lamps shall be set up on the pure gold lampstand, to burn regularly before the Lord.” We have a version of this, the tabernacle light, by the Tabernacle in every Catholic Church. Vs. 8-9, “Regularly on each Sabbath day this bread shall be set out afresh before the Lord, offered on the part of the Israelites by an everlasting agreement.” A priestly people eat of it. When Jesus referred to King David and his men eating this showbread He opens this up to those serving the Lord, who through baptism are servants of the Lord and a priestly people. Vs. 17-21 is the famous “eye for eye, tooth for tooth!” law. Jesus preferred forgiveness because of the difference of getting to the Holy Land vs. getting to heaven. These things are mentioned as “everlasting agreements” which the church honors as a part of the New Covenant in Jesus. We have our versions of them.

Lev. 25: I have been told that the idea of the Sabbatical year, the Jubilee year, and the redemption of property never really caught on with the Jews. I have no verification of that, but this is one way they can even things out so the rich don’t just keep getting richer and the poor get poorer. We have taxes to help with this. The popes have set up Jubilee years in the recent past, but they are not like this. They are simply dedicated getting us reset in terms of a particular aspect of faith. Also realize that this is very different than what we think of as slavery. St. Paul will be dealing from this perspective later on.

Lev. 26: Vs. 14 and on is God’s warning for not obeying. My Dad had a much shorter version of this chapter. “Do what I say and you will probably live a long life.” Dad was forgiving, just like God, so his idea was not that He would kill us, but that we might get ourselves killed. Farming is dangerous. Vs. 44, “Yet even so, even while they are in their enemies’ land, I will not reject or spurn them, lest, by wiping them out, I make void my covenant with the; for I, the Lord, am their God.” Even when the people of Israel are in exile, God has not forgotten them.

Lev. 27: Vs. 30 and on, the Book of Leviticus ends with a reminder of tithing, a priest’s dream. The Old English root of the word tithe means a tenth. I have to presume from other references on one-tenth being offered by Abraham and vs. 32 of every tenth animal that this is an accurate translation.

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Num. 1: It is very hard to come up with any helpful comments about all this census material, except that it shows just how attentive to details the Israelites are. This adds to the credibility of the other writings. The last part of the chapter lets us know that the Levites, or priestly clan, was not a part of this military census. God did not have Moses count them yet because the count was about how many were ready for military service. The priestly clan obviously had a different job in the eyes of God.

Num. 2: This is really set up like a military operation in that even the placements of the tents of the different tribes is organized.

Num. 3: Now we have to count the Levites. In vs. 11-13 God explains how the Levites replace the first-born who had been the ones that were dedicated to God. Now the Levites are the ones who are sacred, dedicated or set aside or this special work or worship. This is how important our worship is to God. It makes me proud to be a part of it.

Num. 4: Tahash skins as mentioned in vs. 11 has different translations; dolphin, mink, ermine or giraffe skins. One rabbi says it is unlikely that it is dolphin in the desert. Otherwise the only clarification that Jewish writings give is that it was pleasing and colorful. Notice that service age was between 30 and 50 years old (vs. 23 and other places). So Zechariah could have only been 50 years old when John the Baptist was conceived. If Elizabeth was the same age it would certainly been old enough to know she was thought to be sterile.

Num. 5: Vs. 8 gives an idea of how confessors came up with the idea that if a person stole and now can't return it, that it is possible to give a compensatory amount to the church. The rest of the chapter is about the test to see if a woman, suspected of adultery, is truly adulterous. It is a strange test but would surely make women nervous of messing around, which would slow down adultery. Rape would have a different punishment and that would be for the man.