

God's Glory in God's Word: Numbers

THEMES OF NUMBERS (continued from last week)

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Command of Israel

At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not set out. (Num 9:18-19)

Command of Events

Consider what Balak said to Balaam:

Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, **for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.**" (Num 22:6)

And Consider what God said to Balaam:

And God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.'" God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." (Num 22:9-12)

Consider what history says concerning Balaam:

In Balaam we have the pagan counterpart to Moses the man of God. This idea has become clearer in a recent archaeological discovery of texts bearing Balaam's name at Deir 'Allah in Jordan. The discovery of these prophetic texts in Aramaic (dated variously from the mid-eighth through the sixth centuries BC) shows how famous Balaam was in the ancient Near East even centuries after his death. Balaam was an internationally known prophet, a diviner who was expert in examining the entrails of animals and in watching the movement of birds to discover the will of the gods.

Allen, Ronald B.; Allen, Ronald B.. Numbers (The Expositor's Bible Commentary) (Kindle Locations 2329-2333). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Consider that a donkey saw what this “prophet” and “diviner” could not:

But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. Then the angel of the LORD went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live." Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back." And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you." So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak. (Num 22:22-35)

Consider the result of Barak’s request - Balaam’s “curse” delivered to Israel:

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you." (Num 24:5-9)

Barak’s desire for Balaam to curse Israel resulted in his own curse:

And he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. (Num 24:15-17)

Command of Everything

For what does Balaam tell Barak about the Lord?

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Num 23:19)

GOD THE ROCK

Recall the first complaint concerning lack of water

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "**Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?**" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock** at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or (Exo 17:1-7)

In Numbers 20, we have a similar problem with a different solution and outcome

Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! **Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place?** It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "**Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water.** So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "**Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?**" And Moses lifted up his hand and **struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly**, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "**Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.**" These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy. (Num 20:2-13)

Questions:

1. What are the key differences in the first and second accounts of lack of water?
2. Who is the provider of the water?
3. Why was Moses punished so severely for what he did in the second scenario?

Consider that God is our Rock

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! (Psa 95:1)

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deu 32:3-4)

The New Testament makes clear that the Rock was Christ

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **Nevertheless**, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. **Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day (see **Numbers 25**). We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents (see **Numbers 21**), nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **Therefore** let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1Co 10:1-12)

And that the Rock was stricken for our salvation

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

And that the striking of the Rock gives us living water

Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Joh 4:6-14)

NEXT WEEK: DEUTERONOMY