

Best Friend, Worst Enemy

March 5 — *Numbers 19:1-21:35*

Today In Your Reading...

The story of Israel fast-forwarded 40 years. The people finished their wandering, those who were supposed to perish in the desert were gone, and they now headed in the direction of Canaan, the Promised Land. This time the Israelites approached from the east rather than from the south. Along the way, Moses' sister Miriam and brother Aaron passed away. Also, three nations came out to fight with the Israelites (Edom, Arad, and the Amorites). Although Israel did not engage the people of Edom, they did battle against Arad and the Amorites. Both times God gave them victory, and the Israelites took possession of their lands and cities.

Another incident that took place was the impatience of Israel along the way. You would think that this generation of Israelites would have learned something from their parents, such as not to complain against the Lord, but no. The people grumbled about their desert travels, and so God sent poisonous snakes to quiet them. Consequently, many people died, until Moses could check the plague by constructing a brass serpent on a pole and carrying it throughout the camp. This symbol is, of course, a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do on the cross, for He was lifted up among the people and all who looked upon Him were saved (*John 3:14*).

Perhaps the saddest part of our reading today was the fact that Moses was told that he would not get to enter Canaan with the people. Why, because of the arrogance he demonstrated at Meribah, when he said, "Listen, you rebels. Must we (or really shall I) bring you water from this rock?" Of course, God had told him to speak to the rock, yet Moses hit it, twice, and attempted to take God's glory for himself. Did Moses forget God's instructions, did he get in a hurry, or did he willfully disobey? It is not clear, but his humility gave way to anger and led to pride.

God's judgment seems harsh here, but **He emphatically opposes pride of any kind from anyone**, even in Moses. *Pride is our enemy. It is the root of all sin.* God does not respond to prideful people but He chooses to give grace to the humble. Thus, we must cultivate humility in our lives. **Humility is our friend**, and we must learn to keep humility by our side at all times.

Daily Reflection

Pride is deceitful. It does not readily reveal itself, so you must be aggressive in seeking it out and uprooting it from your life. What is it about pride that is so offensive to God that He will not tolerate it?

What are some ways that you can cultivate humility in your life and keep your pride in check?

What "Promise Land" is God withholding from you because of your pride? **Humble yourself under His leadership, that He may exalt you at the proper time** (*1 Peter 5:6*).

Diviners and Donkeys

March 6 — Numbers 22:1-24:25

Day 65 — 300 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The people of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab, on the east side of Canaan, and camped near the Jordan River. Of course, the Moabite King, Balak, was concerned when he saw that many people traveling through his kingdom. He was afraid that his army would not be able to defeat such a large number so he resorted to other measures. He hired a well-known medium, named Balaam, famous for divination, to come and curse the Israelites.

Even though Balaam lived among pagan idolaters, he somehow had knowledge of the one true God. Because of that knowledge, Balaam would not speak out against God's people. Instead God used Balaam to bless Israel. He even allowed him to prophesy about the Messiah. Balaam foretold of the star of Bethlehem that would signify the coming of the King (24:17).

How awesome (and typical) for God to use the enemy of His people to bless them! Of course, we should not be surprised by this, or by the fact that God can speak through mules. The Scriptures tell us that God governs in the affairs of men, that **He rules over kings, councils, and countries**. They do as He commands.

Did the Israelites ever know that this drama was going on in the background? Obviously Moses did, because he wrote it down for us. But, did the people of God ever know that there were evil men watching them from the hills and conspiring to do them harm? I don't know. What I do know is that if it were not for the Lord's protection, the people would have been hounded by their enemies.

How often does our enemy wish to do us harm and, yet, by divine protection, we are spared? **What confidence we should have to know that the Lord is on our side**, that our great

spiritual enemy can do us no long-term damage, for even he is under authority. "If God is for us, then who can be against us?" (*Romans 8:31*).

I also love the fact that Balaam, although not a reputable character for sure, would not speak anything that the Lord did not direct him to say. Six times he responded to Balak or his officials that he would not, even could not, say anything "against the will of the Lord" (22:8, 18, 38; 23:12, 26; 24:12, 13). Oh that we would allow God to use our words in such a way, for His purposes and not our own. **All too often, we say what we want rather than what we ought.**

Daily Reflection

How are you doing with your words? Are they typically self-centered and hurtful, or are you using them to glorify God and bless others?

If God can use diviners and donkeys to speak for Him, surely He can use you as well.

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but only such as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, so that it gives grace to those who hear" (*Eph. 4:29*).

Seek and Destroy

March 7 — Numbers 25:1-26:65

Day 66 — 299 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses and Eleazar, the High Priest, were asked to take another census of the people. It had been forty years since the first one and an entire generation of people had died in the desert, as the Lord foretold. The purpose of the census was to count those men of military age and to apportion the land fairly once they entered Canaan.

However, while the tribes camped in the plains of Moab, just east of the Promised Land, many of the men became restless and snuck off to a town called Peor, to indulge themselves with Moabite women. The women there enticed the Israelite men to worship Baal, a false god. The anger of the Lord burned against these men, and He had them executed for their betrayal.

It is difficult for me to understand these men. I get the idea of needing to unwind a bit after they've wandered through the desert for so long; but, after all that they've seen, after all that God had done for them, and after all of the commandments, covenants, warnings, and rebellions, why would anyone be so foolish as to worship the first idol they saw? Was not the first commandment of their covenant to have no other gods? What were they thinking to forget rule number one? All I can think is that *these men were lost in their lust*. **Their physical passions overwhelmed their godly pursuits.**

One man was so bold that he brought a Moabite woman back to his tent in the Israelite camp, before God, Moses, and everyone else! He might as well have had sex with her in the Tabernacle! One of the priests named Phinehas was so furious that he jumped up, grabbed a spear, and skewered them both like a shish-kabob!

As a result, the Lord commanded Moses to attack and destroy the Midianites. Thus, the temptation to worship other gods was abated.

Daily Reflection

Why do you think sin is so offensive to the Lord? What is it particularly about idol worship that angers Him most?

What can you learn from Phinehas concerning how to deal with your temptations and sins?

When dealing with temptation and sin, *you cannot be passive. You must be aggressive!* Like these men, **temptation will lure you away from the Lord's camp**. Over time, you may even become so comfortable with your sin that you bring it into the Lord's camp.

Be aware that sin will undermine your relationship with the Lord and destroy any godly pursuits that you have. Be aggressive and deal with your temptations and sins before they overwhelm and overtake you.

"If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you..." (*Matthew 18:9*).

A Living Sacrifice

March 8 — Numbers 27:1-29:40

Day 67 — 298 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord gave instructions regarding the laws of inheritance or property rights, after the daughters of Zelophehad petitioned Moses for land in Canaan. Also Joshua was commissioned by the people to follow Moses as the new leader of the nation. Then, God gave His statutes regarding the required offerings for each day, each Sabbath, each month, and each of the festivals.

As I read today, I was dumbfounded by all of the animals that were sacrificed in these fixed offerings. Just for the daily offering alone, two lambs were sacrificed, which means that for a given year over 700 lambs were slaughtered. Every Sabbath day, two more lambs were to be offered, which means 114 lambs for the year. Then, each month, two bulls, one ram, and seven lambs were to be sacrificed, for a total of 120 animals for the year. Altogether then, nearly 1000 animals were offered annually.

For the festivals, I counted 21 rams, 79 bulls, and 144 lambs to be sacrificed. All said, just for festivals, the required sacrifices totaled 1178 animals; and, of course, this number does not include offerings and sacrifices given by individuals, families, tribes, etc., for sins, intentional and unintentional, and for other reasons. It's a wonder that the Israelites did not run out of animals!

It would be an understatement to say that the priests and Levites were busy, constantly killing, carving, or cooking an animal, around the clock perhaps. The altar would have been in use at all times, because *the sacrifices were endless*. Considering these things makes me thankful that we do not use the sacrificial system anymore, but that it was replaced by the blood of Jesus. **Because of His sinless sacrifice on the cross, all was finished.** The system is now and will always be unnecessary!

Daily Reflection

Another thing that struck me today was that the people of God were constantly making offerings to the Lord, sacrificing something in His name. How would that relate to you today? What do you have to offer to the Lord?

Paul wrote "to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (*Romans 12:1*). What do you think Paul meant by a living sacrifice? Isn't that impossible?

There is nothing you have to do to become acceptable. *Because of Christ, you are acceptable to God.* All you need to do now is surrender all that you have, all that you do, and all that you are to be used by Him for His service. **Are you willing to be an offering to Him?**

True Colors

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord gave Moses His laws regarding vows and then commanded him to “take vengeance on the Midianites for leading the Israelites into idolatry” (31:1). Thus, Moses arranged for 12,000 armed men to attack God’s enemies, and Phinehas, the zealous priest, led them into battle with the sacred objects of the Tabernacle leading the way. Not one Israelite was harmed.

My guess is that you may have been caught off guard by the execution of the Midianite boys and women. Moses was furious to find out that they were allowed to live (31:14); he immediately ordered that they be put to death. At first glance, this order rocks our moral senses and, for a moment, we may even pass judgment on God’s actions here. But, let’s not move so fast!

This order will not be the last of its kind; in fact, Israel will be used by God to punish and, yes, destroy the wicked Canaanites for their sins. God had been patient with their debauchery for more than 400 years and now it was time for them to be judged for their defiance. Just as He did in the flood of Noah’s day, in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the land of Egypt, God will, by no means, let the guilty go unpunished (Exodus 20:4, 5). **God is sovereign over all men and nations**, and in His sovereignty, **He is the righteous Judge**. He holds everyone accountable to their actions.

Did you happen to notice, in the midst of the destruction of the Midianites, that Balaam was captured and killed? But wait, wasn’t Balaam a good guy? No, Balaam was rotten. He was a medium, a diviner, who worked for the highest bidder. Although he heard from God and made prophecies concerning Israel, he, like so many others, sold his soul to the devil for the love of money.

Evidently, after not being able to curse Israel directly for King Balak (Numbers 22-24), he found another way to achieve what the King requested. He deceived God’s people through sexual immorality and led them to worship Baal. Thus, God was justified in executing Balaam for his evil, as He was in killing the rest of the clan.

Daily Reflection

Unfortunately, there are many Balaams in our world today, those who will do anything for money, even play the part of a God-follower; but, *in time, their true colors become evident*, and they are exposed for their wickedness.

Knowing this is the case, that there are many pretenders around you, what does that mean in regards to how you perceive the world and those who live in it?

Isn’t it interesting that sexual sins, idol worship, and money are all related. Why do you think that is? What is their connection?

What are your true colors? To whom are you sold out? Where does your allegiance lie?

Settling for Safe

March 10 — *Numbers 32:1-33:56*

Day 69 — 296 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses wrote a review of Israel's journey from Egypt to the Jordan River and all the stops in between. He then reminded the people to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan and to destroy all of their high places, altars, and idols, or else the Canaanites would become "as splinters in their eyes and as thorns in their sides; and they would harass them in the land..." (33:55).

We will come back to these warnings later in the year, because they will be repeated numerous times; but for now, I think the most important story of the day was the request Moses received from the tribes of Reuben and Gad (and later on Manasseh too). While the Israelites camped beside Mt. Nebo, near the Jordan River, rested from their wars and prepared to enter the land of Canaan, a few of the tribes conspired to keep the land they had just won.

The nation, as a whole, had just routed the Amorites, the Moabites, and the Midianites; it seemed logical that someone would need to inhabit their homes, keep their crops, and subdue their land. It also seemed like the perfect place to raise cattle, which was the reason they presented their proposal to Moses. "The land is ideally suited for all our flocks and herds. If we have found favor with you, please let us have this land as our property instead of giving us land across the Jordan River" (32:4, 5).

Moses was upset, of course, when he heard that they didn't want to enter the Promised Land! He likened these men to their forefathers, who despised God's gift of Canaan and were sentenced to die in the desert. In his tantrum, it seemed as if Moses were saying to these men, "Why do you always bail out on God and forfeit His best for your life? Why can't you be more like Joshua and Caleb, who follow the Lord fully?" (32:12). He did not foresee this unusual request.

Daily Reflection

Oftentimes, when it comes to God's direction in our lives, **we will forfeit what He wants and, instead, settle for what we want.** Usually, settling for us means to choose what is safe, comfortable, or convenient. *Following God's will seems risky. we dare not brave the unknown.*

Where do you land? Are you too anxious to "cross the Jordan" and see what God has in store for you? Or are you quick to settle down into what's comfortable, easy, or convenient?

Do you have what it takes to wait for God's best in your life? Or will you decide for yourself and settle for your own desires? What qualities are necessary to push on to the Promised Land? What does it take to refuse to settle?

"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (*Psalms 37:4*).

