

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 12 – August 22nd, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 34-36

Luke 1-4

Readings in Class:

Numbers 15-30

Christ in the Book of Numbers

As he typically is elsewhere in the Old Testament, Christ can be found all over the pages of the book of Numbers. Here are some very clear and obvious examples that help us see who Jesus is and what he will come to do in the New Testament:

Reconciliation upon the death of the High Priest: In chapter 35, the Israelites are given instruction upon the cities of refuge. These cities were established so that someone who was guilty of accidental death could flee to and live in. For example, if a farming accident happened and a fellow killed his neighbor by mistake, he would leave his land and go to these places of shelter. The friends and family of the killed man could not kill him in retribution as long as he remains in that city of refuge. If he left the city and was found, his life was fair game.

Numbers 35 goes on to note that there is only one solution for the person living in the city of refuge after they are put there: the death of the high priest. Once the high priest died, his death was counted as sufficient atonement for the life that was lost. Peace and reconciliation were made between adversaries at the cost of the High Priest's life. No more can vengeance be taken.

This gives way to the idea that God is "our refuge and strength" as the Psalms note and also that the death of our High Priest, Jesus, has stilled the hand of the avenger and has brought peace to animosity between hurt people who have sinned. And not only for accidental deaths, but Jesus is our place of refuge for intentional and wicked sins as well!

Bronze Serpent: In Numbers 21, we come across the all too familiar story of the people complaining and God providing. The conflict begins when the people want to go back to Egypt and then note with added maliciousness that "we hate this worthless food." They are talking about the manna that God has provided faithfully every day.

This is a rather biting comment about God's miraculous bread from heaven. So God bites back by sending "fiery serpents" among the people and we are told that many die. Curious side note is that fiery is where we get the word seraphim. These could be heavenly, or even demonic, creatures that are sent to punish the people.

This causes the people to cry out to the Lord for mercy and he does have mercy. God's answer is not to take away the serpents, but to have Moses construct a bronze serpent and place it on a pole. This image is where the medical field gets the logo of a serpent on a pole as well. God tells those who look on it that they will live.

It is a test of faith to keep one's eyes on the bronze serpent above, even while there could be snakes crawling around one's feet!

This image is used by Jesus in John 3, to describe to Nicodemus what Jesus has come to do. That just as Moses put up the bronze serpent, so too must Jesus be lifted up on the cross and those that see him will live! So keep your eyes on the cross, even as the punishment and fear of sin might be slithering around one's feet!

Balaam's Fourth Oracle: The character and story of Balaam is set up as the climax of the book of Numbers. In Chapter 22, we finish the series of rebellions that the Israelites have committed toward God, even that of Moses himself!

Balaam is brought in by the Moabites, especially Balak their King, in order that he might curse the Israelites. He seems to be a pagan seer and of note is that an archaeological dig with his name has recently been found!

He is allowed by God to come to Balak but is put under strict command by God (and his donkey!) to say only what God will allow him to say. Three times he is called to curse, but three times God only allows him to bless. This is amazing on God's part, since he has put up with rebellion after rebellion and we might agree that he should let them be cursed. But for the sake of his promises, he will not allow it.

Balaam's fourth oracle in 24:15-25 is clear line to Jesus Christ. Balaam sees one who is coming, who will rule and have dominion from the line of Judah and shall "crush the forehead of Moab." Moab, who is one of the chief enemies of God's people, is given demonic overtones with this line. One will remember the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the son of Eve would crush the serpent's forehead. Here this promise is made clearer that a Son of Judah will do this. This points us to Jesus Christ.

Wilderness Wandering: The 40 years of the wilderness wandering show us the people of Israel's failure to be faithful to their God, but God's continuing faithfulness toward his people.

Their story gets a do over in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus is sent into the wilderness for 40 days and nights to mimic and recreate this narrative. But unlike the Israelites, Jesus remains faithful under stress and temptation from the devil, showing us that Jesus is the true Israel to give us life.

Jesus even quotes the book of Deuteronomy each time he is tempted as a way of showing that he is going to succeed where the people of old did not.