

Numbers 21-23

November 27, 2011

21:1-3 We begin today with the first 3 verses of chapter 21. Why do you think that God had Israel “utterly destroy” these Canaanites?

- God made it clear over and over to Israel that they were to exterminate the pagan cultures that inhabited the Promised Land so that the ungodly beliefs and practices of those people would not infect the Jews. See Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 12:1-8; 20:19-18. One thing that these nations did was to sacrifice their children to their gods. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13. [9 “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, be very careful not to imitate the detestable customs of the nations living there. 10 For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, 11 or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord. It is because the other nations have done these detestable things that the Lord your God will drive them out ahead of you. 13 But you must be blameless before the Lord your God.] NLT

What significance does this have to us today?

- God’s people are not to live like the people of the world. We are to be separate from them (2 Corinthians 3:17); we are not to allow their sin and worldliness to infiltrate our lives or churches. See 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. People in our day tend to take sin lightly; God takes sin very seriously. Turn with me to Matthew 5:27-30 and let’s see what Jesus said about dealing with the sin of immorality. 27 “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. NLT

21:4-9 Who can tell us what takes place in verses 4 to 9?

- The people again complained about the conditions they were living in. God judged them by sending poisonous serpents among them. Those bitten were dying. Moses intercedes for the people and God tells him to build a bronze serpent to be held up high in the camp. Those bitten could look to the serpent and be saved from death.

What is the significance of this story and are there any lessons in it for us?

- Sin always leads to death (Romans 6:23). We are saved from God’s judgment and the penalty of our sin by “looking to” and “trusting in” Jesus. See John 3:14-15 and 12:31-33. [14 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. [31 The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. 32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate how he was going to die. NLT

21:10-35 The rest of the chapter tells us of Israel’s journey and two battles in which they were victorious.

22:1-21 Who can tell us what takes place in chapter 22 verses 1 to 21?

- The king of Moab fears Israel so he tries to “hire” a prophet named Balaam (*BAY-lum*) to curse the Jews. Balaam tells him that the Jews are blessed and that he cannot curse them. The king of Moab then sends more important messengers and offers more money to Balaam. Balaam tells them that he cannot curse Israel but God tells him to go with them.

Is Balaam a legitimate prophet?

- Verse 6 tells us that he had a reputation for being accurate.

Is Balaam just a “general” prophet or is he a prophet of Jehovah?

- He is a prophet of Jehovah. When LORD is spelled in all caps, it is the translation of Jehovah / I AM. He speaks in verses 8 and 18 about Jehovah being his God.

22:22-35 What happens in verses 22 to 35?

- Balaam is riding on his donkey on his way to see the king of Moab. His donkey sees an angel with a sword that Balaam does not see and he tries to avoid the angel. Balaam strikes the donkey each time and the donkey eventually speaks to him. The donkey tells him about the angel and then Balaam’s eyes are opened and he sees the angel. The angel allows him to go on but warns him only to say what God tells him to say.

22:22,32-33 The text doesn’t tell us, but why do you think that the angel was going to kill him?

- God knows what we will do before we even do it (Psalm 139:4). Balaam probably thought that he would not be seduced by the money and curse Israel, but God (being all-knowing and eternal) knew that he was going to do just that.

22:22 Who was this angel?

- He was THE angel of the Lord... the preincarnate Jesus.

What do we learn about the “unseen” in this passage?

- There are things going on that we do not see. When Elisha was surrounded in 2 Kings 6:18-23, he saw angels and chariots of fire that the younger prophet did not see.

What do you make of the donkey speaking?

- God can do whatever he pleases (Psalm 115:3); nothing is impossible to Him (Jeremiah 32:17,27). Heaven will be the restoration of the Eden God created. Therefore, it can be assumed that there will be animals in heaven. It is possible that the animals there will speak. A donkey spoke here. Satan inhabited a serpent in Eden. It is possible that the serpent spoke before Satan inhabited it to tempt Adam and Eve.

22:36-41 Here the king of Moab meets Balaam and takes him to the place where he expects him to curse Israel. Balaam tells him that he can only speak the words given to him by God.

23:1-30 Who can tell us what takes place in chapter 23?

- God tells Balaam to bless Israel from two different places and then the king takes Balaam to a third place in hopes that he might get a different word from God in a different place.

What do you think about Balaam’s willingness to go to other places with the king and to seek another word from God?

- God had told him to bless Israel. He didn’t need to seek the Lord from some other place to find God’s will on the matter...especially after what God said about Himself in verse 19.

23:19 What principle might we learn from verse 19?

- If God has told us what to do, it is an insult to His character to ask Him again what He wants us to do. When God speaks, we are to act...not keep seeking another word from Him or from the advice of others.