

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Dec. 17, 2017

This Sunday, Dec. 17th, your readings should be Day 85: Chapters 34-35 of Numbers, Psalm 86, and Acts 19:1-20.

There will be no class for the next two Sundays so the readings for the next class, January 7 will be days 85-91.

At the beginning of class we had a discussion on whether purgatory is scripturally sound. Here is what the Catholic Dictionary states.

PURGATORY (Latin, “cleansing” or “purifying”) Defined by theologians as the condition of those who have died in the state of grace but with lingering attachment to sin. In purgatory these souls are purified for a time before being admitted to the glory and happiness of heaven. In this period of passive suffering, they are purged of unrepented venial sins, satisfy the demands of divine justice for temporal punishment due for sins, and are made ready for the beatific vision.

The doctrine of purgatory is found in Scripture but is not fully developed. The two passages most clearly related to it are 2 Macc 12:45 and 1 Cor 3:12–15.

In 2 Maccabees, Judas Maccabeus sends twelve thousand drachmas to Jerusalem to have sacrifices offered for the sins of the dead. This action clearly supposes that forgiveness of faults and the expiation of guilt are still possible for the deceased. And not only that but the actions of Judas Maccabeus indicate that prayers and liturgical rites conducted by the living can benefit the deceased. Thus, Catholic tradition concludes that it is “a holy and pious thought” to make “atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Macc 12:45).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is discussing the Lord’s scrutiny of our works on the Day of Judgment. Here it is said that each person’s works will be tested with “fire” to see whether they are worthy of a reward (1 Cor 3:13). If not, the person will “suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15). It is clear from this text that even persons who are saved, if their deeds in life are shady and imperfect, will pass through a fiery process of suffering on the way to glory.

A third passage, Matt 12:32, is likewise explained along these lines by Saint Gregory the Great: “As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come” (*Dialogues* 4.39; cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Hom. 1 Cor 3.15*; Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *De iis qui in fide dormiunt*) (CCC 1030–32, 1472).¹

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 15: As I mentioned the struggle between the Jewish and Gentile converts went on for a while. This Council of Jerusalem was a part of it. In vs. 7, we see who they saw as boss, Peter. But this struggle went on after this council until A.D. 70 when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. You don’t hear about it after that. Probably because the Jews were struggling with their own identity, much less their identity as Christians. Actually for the Christians it was easy, they were no longer Jews but Christians. Vs. 22-35 is an Apostolic Exhortation. We still have them from their

¹ Hahn, S. (Ed.). (2009). In *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (pp. 745–746). New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday.

successors. Vs. 36-41 is a reminder that these guys are not perfect. They argue and disagree. We still have that also.

Acts 16: Paul keeps up his mission trips and the church “grew stronger in faith and increased in number.” (vs. 5) Then Paul went other places and met Lydia and she provided a home for them. Then in vs. 16-24 the devil made the fortune-teller slave girl say false things about Paul and Silas. Paul drove out the devil, which got him arrested because she had made money for her owners by contradicting him. They were tried, beaten with rods, and put in prison. During the night an earthquake freed them from their chains but they didn’t leave so the jailer and his family were baptized. Possibly infant baptisms. When Paul revealed that he was a Roman citizen, it scared these Jewish magistrates, who apologized.

Acts 17: In Thessalonica Paul made more converts, some prominent women. This is significant because Christianity gave woman more rights than any other system of government or religion. It gave them a dignity of their own. That in itself is a disturbance. Slaves felt the same way, dignified by Jesus. Poor Jason pays a price for housing these missionaries. In Athens Paul preaches but in vs. 19 for a chance to officially hear him out. This was the Greek version of a synagogue. It is also what is happening in the picture of our new window at the hall entrance. Vs. 32, Paul must not have convinced them all, “We should like to hear you on this some other time.”

Acts 18: Paul’s preaching in Corinth was successful so God told him to stay. So he was there a year and a half. Some Jews there took him to Gallio, the tribunal. Gallio was not impressed so they beat up Sosthenes, who had been allowing Paul to preach in the synagogue. In Syria Antioch, Paul cuts his hair to make a Nazarite vow. Apollos was a poorly instructed convert from Judaism but he got corrected and did well.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Psalm 79: A prayer of Jesus speaking as a part of the people of Israel and/or the Church in times of trouble.

Psalm 80: This psalm is like the last one in that Jesus is speaking for His Mystical Body. Vs. 9-18 refer to the vine that God is nurturing. Jesus obviously continues with that theme in His public ministry.

Psalm 81: This psalm is a dialogue between God and His people. Note in these psalms about God’s work, that they remind us of the things of the OT that are foreshadowings of the NT. In vs. 6 we have Joseph coming out of Egypt as a foreshadowing of Jesus coming from Egypt. In vs. 8 we have a reference to the waters of Meribah, which came from the rock; symbolizing the waters of baptism coming from the Church founded on the Rock. But the layout of the psalm starts with Jesus praying but then with the end of vs. 6 (“I hear a new oracle”) He introduces the words of the Father and His hopes for His people. So the rest of the psalm is written to help us understand the Father’s thoughts. (vs. 7-17)

Psalm 82: Jesus talks about His Father and mocks the false gods because they do nothing. These man-made gods or men who think they are gods will die (vs. 7).

Psalm 83: This psalm is not about peace. Vs. 16, “Pursue them with your tempest; terrify them with your storm.” I don’t know all the places mentioned like in vs. 10-11 but Midian we have just

read about and remember that Moses escaped to Midian and found his first wife there after leaving Egypt at age 40 (Ex. 2) Endor is the area of Megiddo that was wiped out many times. This is partly why people don't think the OT is like the NT because so many places are wiped out but the only difference is really that Jesus did not kill but warned constantly of Hell. If this is truly a prayer of Jesus we have to ask whether He was kidding around when He said the road to heaven was narrow and hard.

Psalm 84: This is a perfect prayer for Jesus (vs. 10, "look upon the face of your anointed."), as He was being tempted by the Satan. Satan was tempting Him with earthly kingdoms and He was focusing on the heavenly kingdom. Vs. 11, "Better one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. Better the threshold of the house of my God than a home in the tents of the wicked."

Psalm 85: In this psalm Jesus is once more standing for His people (His Body, the Church) and praying for mercy. Vs. 11 is about the balance between justice and peace, or God's vengeance and mercy.

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Num. 20: In vs. 11, I had always wondered why Moses was punished for striking the rock twice, until I asked a rabbi. He explained that Moses struck it the first time as God has said. Water had not come out immediately so he struck it again as if he could get the water out but just hitting the rock harder himself. Vs. 10, "He and Aaron assembled the community in front of the rock, where he said to them, 'Listen to me, you rebels! Are we to bring water for you out of this rock?'" This showed that he was no longer trusting God but thinking he was the one making the great things happen. Vs. 12, "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you were not faithful to me in showing forth my sanctity before the Israelites, you shall not lead this community into the land I will give them.'" More signs had been given Moses so much was expected of him, and he failed. Miriam, the sister of Moses, died at the beginning of this chapter. Aaron, his brother, died at the end of the chapter, but it could have been years apart. In going through Edom, they do not want to start a war so they go around.

Num. 21: John 3:14 says: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." The bronze serpent foreshadowed Jesus by saving the lives of those who had been bitten by serpents. Vs. 14 mentions the "Book of the Wars of the Lord." This text was lost over the centuries because it was not important to God to have it included in the inspired Scriptures. Psalms 135 & 136 mention some of these battles like the victory over Og, the king of Bashan.

Num. 22: The story of Balaam is fun. First Balaam is supposed to refuse to join the princes. Then he is allowed to go, under certain conditions, but then the Lord changed his mind and sent the angel which scared the ass, who then talked. It is awesome. Then he is allowed to go again under certain conditions.

Num. 23: Balak is determined to get what he wants from God, like you would a slot machine. But he is finding out that God is not forced by our will. Num. 23:22 and 24:8, "It is God who brought

him out of Egypt, a wild bull of towering might.” This refers to Israel but can also refer to Jesus coming out of Egypt. Balak tries to get different results by going to different places, probably because he thinks in terms of different gods. He does not understand the one God who is almighty.

Num. 24: Vs. 17, “I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near; a star shall advance from Jacob, and a staff shall rise from Israel, that shall smite the brows of Moab...” The footnotes state that the Church Fathers have mentioned this as a Messianic prophecy, but it is a weak one. That might be because Balaam seems to be more of a seer than a prophet.

Num. 25: “the people degraded themselves by having illicit relations with the Moabite women. These then invited the people to the sacrifices of their god...” (vs. 1-2) This is a double break of the commandments and death was the result. It is hard to imagine what this would have been like. Picture the men of Nebraska deciding they would go to Nevada and have their way with the woman of Nevada and then participating in the games of Nevada because that is what they do in Nevada. The people of Nevada would say it is great because that is what prostitution and gambling is there for. But God is not happy with the Israelites who should be focused on Him and His laws.

Num. 26: Another census, and we learn in vs. 59 that Jochebed and Amram of the tribe of Levi were the mother and father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Part of the purpose of this census might have been to help portion out the land of Israel when they got there. The bigger tribes would get better land. I am surmising this because vs. 63-65 lets us know that the original guys who had turned against God were now dead so these would be the ones that would go to the Promised Land.

Num. 27: Notice that God makes an exception to take care of daughters who have no men (father or brothers) to give them status by law. This adds more clarification to the practical aspect of Jesus naming the beloved disciple to take care of Mary as He was dying on the cross. Vs. 13, “taken to your people” is obviously dying. Vs. 18, Joshua is to succeed Moses. Joshua means a man of spirit, very similar to the name Jesus.

Num. 28 & 29: This is mostly a repeat of Lev. 23. Each gives a slightly different version of how to celebrate the holydays. These are not holidays. They are all about how to thank God. The question that has been asked in the discussion of chapters like these is where all the animals come from to do these sacrifices. I don’t know for sure but one explanation is that this information was being passed on by oral tradition long before it was written on scrolls. With the oral tradition there seems to be a problem keeping the timeline straight. At this point in the narrative the Israelites are very close to the Promised Land. This is no longer just desert they are in. They have grown and they are a force of people to be worried about by the kings around them. One scholar taught that they became mercenaries and fought for different kings and got paid or threatened people and they paid them off in livestock. Having them grow strong as a nation was a part of God’s plan in keeping them in the desert for 40 years. But these holiday policies fit with their life in the Promised Land better than when they were in the desert. The other question that comes up with these chapters is how out of place they seem. It is like a scroll from Leviticus got placed in Numbers by mistake.

Num. 30: One of the possible grounds for an annulment in the Church is lack of maturity or ability to make a vow. This chapter looks at this issue in terms of the vows of women, which is important for women have no rights apart from the man in their life. So a husband or a father can countermand the vow of a woman. This is again an important reason that Mary had John to look after her after the death of Jesus.

Num. 31: Okay, now we are back to the story of Balaam. This is why we think a scroll got mixed in. In vs. 8 we find out that Balaam is killed along with Midianite kings. In vs. 16 we find out that the Israelites did not kill the Midianite women. Here is why: “Why, they are the very ones who on Balaam’s advice prompted the unfaithfulness of the Israelites toward the Lord in the Peor affair (Num.25), which began the slaughter of the Lord’s community.” Booty and tax is figured in vs. 40, “and sixteen thousand persons, of whom thirty-two fell as tax to the Lord.” I presume that these were slaves and were considered property. Vs. 34, part of the booty was 32,000 girls who were virgins. If they had not been slaves, they would have been killed. This is OT slavery, which I don’t believe the Israelites would have had in the time of Jesus. St. Paul didn’t condemn slavery but gave slaves a different status than this part of the Bible, for it was wartime.

Num. 32: The tribes of Gad and Reuben ask to claim the land they are already in rather than waiting for a portion of the land across the Jordan River. Moses agrees with this as long as they help fight in the upcoming battles when they do cross the river.

Num. 33: They even kept a log of where they had camped on their journey through the desert. Vs. 39 mentions that Aaron was 123 when he died. Even if this is not numerically accurate I’m sure he felt that old after all they had gone through. Vs. 55-56, “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those whom you allow to remain will become as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will harass you in the country where you live, and I will treat you as I had intended to treat them.”