

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

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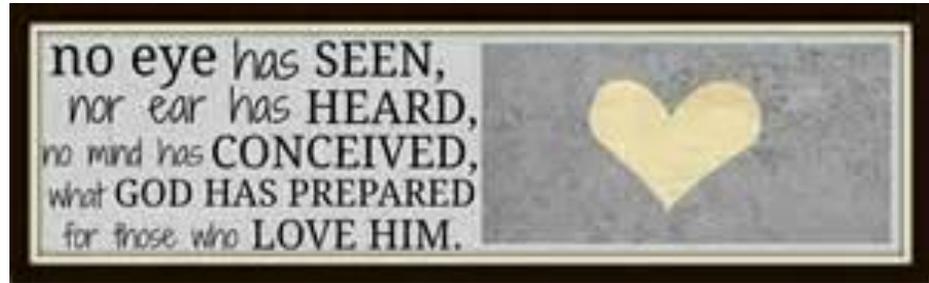
- ✓ Numbers 19:1-20:13 – Laws of purification (19). Waters of Meribah (20).
- ✓ 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 – True wisdom of God.
- ✓ Psalm 18:13-30 – Thanksgiving for Victory.

REFLECTIONS:

Numbers 19:1-20:13. In chapter 20 we have the first trial and failure of the new generation, some 37 years after the failure of the old generation and *on the same spot*. Even after two million deaths of their fathers and mothers, the sin of unbelief persists in their progeny. Moses failed here as well as indicated by his harsh words. Here we see Moses' harsh attitude toward the people of God and his arrogation to himself the power of working miracles. His angry scolding betrays his wounded pride, which is also why he is so annoyed at the rebellion *against his own authority*—rather than grief at the people's distrust of God. I once thought that Moses' character had degenerated to the point of being an angry and bitter man, totally unfit to enter the Promised Land. The reason, of course, was because the penalty seems to severe for a onetime lapse. However, after teaching this passage, a lady from the FBC family came up and showed me in the following narrative that Moses was not a bitter person. She is right. I guess I am not always right as I like to claim;-) The incident at Meribah was a lapse in the life of Moses. The penalty for not believing God or treating Him holy was severe because *to whom much is given much is expected*. We are all responsible, especially we who know better: **Luke 12:48**, "*But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*"



1 Corinthians 2:1-16. Paul's disclaimer about his own brilliance did not mean that God puts a premium on ignorance or rejects wisdom of any sort. His point is that there is a wisdom taught by the Spirit which Paul wanted his readers to grasp firmly—and the mature in the context did get it. It is God the Holy Spirit who raises the believer's mind and will to the supernatural level so that the believer can "get it." Apart from the Holy Spirit, the believer cannot clearly perceive *the reality* of God and His manifold truths regardless of the greatness of one's



intellect. As Paul notes here, it is the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to know *the deep things of God*. Spiritually deep things, as per special revelation about God as opposed to general revelation about God, require the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I do not accept the common belief that the sufferings in our lives are the highest means of learning. As I reflect on all of the wonderful things I have learned about God (Esse, God, creation, man, spiritual virtue, language and reality, the spiritual life), not one of those things came through suffering. How could they? Sure, suffering can teach us some things, but the idea that we need to swim in the gutter and suffer for our sins to appreciate the grace of God is false. Such an idea promotes sin and evil above the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit. Again, I am not denying that truths can be more personal through suffering, but it is not better than living under the unhindered ministry of the Holy Spirit. For example, I can learn supernatural patience under the Holy Spirit in a way that no amount of testing of patience could ever deliver on a natural level. There is certainly no indication in this chapter that we learn the deep things of God through suffering—suffering is not even mentioned. Again, there can be no doubt that one can gain insights by suffering under evil. But there are certain things we do not need to learn to have a better spiritual life with God. For example, I do not need to accidentally run over a child, even though I would learn how it feels and be able to better communicate it to others who have done the same. Yes, like in the Fall of Adam and Eve, there was knowledge that they gained through evil, but it did not improve their spiritual life with the Lord. Moreover, what we learn in suffering as such has *no doctrinal content* in and of itself. I can't see how suffering in and of itself could reach what the Holy Spirit in and of itself teaches: *the deep things of God* (1 Cor. 2:10). Again, I am not denying that suffering handled properly can make certain truths more personal. What I am denying is this nonsense that God sends evil suffering on believers as the best means to making them spiritually greater. It has been my experience that many anti-intellectual Christians, year after year, keep talking about their testing and what they are learning from suffering and putting that learning on a much higher level than metaphysical realities of God and the Total Truth. If they value suffering so much, why don't they become a religious ascetics and beat themselves with whips—for I am sure they will learn a few things about how it feels to be beaten with a whip that they would not have learned otherwise. If suffering for evil was such a wonderful gift, then why don't we have prayers of thanksgiving for the sufferings as such instead of thanksgiving *in* and for deliverance from sufferings? As far as Jesus Himself learning obedience from suffering, that is on a totally different level as God needed to enter into man's world. Besides, what was His attitude during those sufferings? Bring it on? No! That tells us a lot about what our attitudes should be: "deliver us from evil" not "bring them on for greater goods." Christianity is not masochistic!

Psalm 18:13-30. David cries out to God in times of evil suffering and thanks God for deliverance. In all of our evil sufferings we are to look to God rather than some other greater good as part of a barter or trade off system making the suffering worth it. God is our comfort, not this world, and not even to make us better. We are to look to the God of comfort rather than to self to erect another floor of our edification complex or gain some “spiritual breakthrough.” Yes, we can glory in our sufferings because we look to the God of all comfort (instead of a god of all suffering), but not *because* of our sufferings. Again, the Christian life is not one of spiritual masochism.



Moreover, we should not feel guilty for praying for protection from evil. The good life is not inimical to the spiritual life. Let us not romanticize about evil and suffering. Let us follow all of the examples in the Bible of saints seeking deliverance from them by looking to God as the Greatest Good, *the God of all comfort*.

In, by, with, through, and for *Esse*,

Pastor Don