

Beauties of the Truth

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Balaam's Talking Donkey

"And Jehovah opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" (Numbers 22:28).

Balaam's ass is famous for refusing to carry Balaam forward as he wished, and then speaking to Balaam to defend himself against the beating that Balaam gave her.

The verbal interchange between Balaam and his donkey¹ has captivated the attention and imagination of many readers through the years. One immediately wonders why Balaam did not come to marvelled attention as his beast of burden began to converse in human language. But so intent was Balaam on pursuing his ill-advised course, that rather than stop in stunned amazement, he continued to argue his case and chastise his burro for her reticence.

Donkeys can be characteristically difficult to coax forward when they perceive danger — and Balaam's ass rightly perceived danger. "It is considerably more difficult to force or frighten a donkey into doing something it perceives to be dangerous for whatever reason. Once a person has earned their confidence, they can be willing and companionable partners and very dependable in work" (Wikipedia, "Donkey," subsection Behavior).

In the extraordinary exchange between Balaam and his donkey, there may be some extraordinary lessons. This is supported by the fact that Revelation 2:14 refers to Balaam and his wayward interest in preaching for hire. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

(1) The terms ass or donkey are evidently interchangeable. Wikipedia, under "Donkey," says this: "Traditionally, the scientific name for the donkey is *Equus asinus asinus* ... At one time the synonym 'ass' was the more common term for the donkey ... The first recorded use of 'donkey' was in 1784 or 1785. ... The word 'ass' has cognates in most other Indo-Europeans languages ... From the 18th century, 'donkey' gradually replaced 'ass.' The change may have come about through a tendency to avoid pejorative terms in speech." Sometimes in the southwest of America and in Mexico they are referred to as burros.

BACKGROUND

Israel had crossed the Arnon River, into the land east of Jordan that would become part of their possession. "They ... pitched on the other [northern] side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites" (Numbers 21:13).

This had formerly been part of the territory of Moab, whose northern border with Ammon had been the river Jabbok. However, an Amorite king named Sihon had overrun the land between the Arnon River on the south, and the Jabbok River on the north. "Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon" (Numbers 21:26).

God instructed Moses that Israel would not receive the lands of Moab or Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:9, 19). Perhaps because Sihon ruled in land that he had taken from Moab, Moses send messengers to "Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land," agreeing not to take from their fields, or vineyards, or even drink their well water. But in response, Sihon mounted an attack, so "Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon until Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon ... Israel took all these cities" (Numbers 21:21-25).

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Thereafter the Israelites went northward, apparently north of Ammon, and took the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, that evidently included an area something like the Golan Heights of today.

These two notable conquests east of the Jordan River were later referred to in Joshua 2:10, “We have heard ... what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed” (See also Joshua 9:10, 12:2,4, Nehemiah 9:22).

Thereafter, the Israelites pitched in the plains east of the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea, across from Jericho. This location is referred to as “the plains of Moab, on this [eastern] side Jordan by Jericho” (Numbers 22:1). Perhaps it was called “the plains of Moab” because this was part of the territory Sihon had previously taken from Moab.

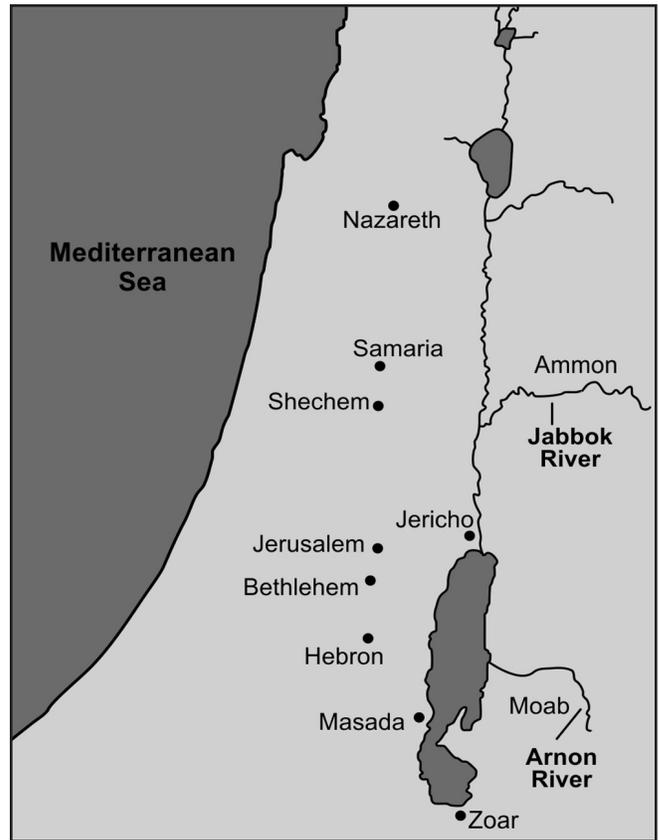
It was here — after two major victories of the Israelites over Amorites (Sihon and Og) — that Balak, king of Moab, began to fear. He did not need to. Moses had not threatened Moab and had no intention of doing so. But Balak feared. He consulted “the elders of Midian,” who evidently bordered Moab and felt some concern as well. Midian was the fourth son of Keturah (Genesis 25:2), and Moab was a son of Lot, so both of them had some kinship with the Israelites, but fear took the upper hand.

Moab and Midian decided to enlist the services of a non-Israelite prophet of God in order to curse Israel. Balaam was their choice. He lived in Pethor, “by the river,” evidently the Euphrates River (Numbers 22:5). That would be somewhat east, but mostly north, perhaps 300 miles or more distant from the Israelite camp, some miles south of the more famous Carchemish on the Euphrates.

Balak sent his emissaries and pleaded for Balaam’s assistance, but to no avail. That night Balaam asked God, and received the reply, “Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed” (Numbers 22:12). Balaam therefore announced to his guests the next morning that he would not go, and they returned to Balak unsuccessful.

Whereupon Balak sent other emissaries, more honorable, with greater gifts, insistent in their urging. Balaam should have said no. God’s instructions had been clear. But instead, Balaam inquired again. Though he told the representatives, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God,” he nevertheless asked again — so God replied differently. “God came unto Balaam at night, and said ... If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do” (Numbers 22:18-20).

Balaam went. However, God was not pleased. This is evident from verse 22, “And God’s anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of Jehovah stood in the way for an adversary against him” (Numbers 22:22). It was here that the incident with Balaam’s ass unfolded.



Map of Israel including the Arnon and Jabbok Rivers

His donkey saw what Balaam did not, the angel of God with sword drawn to take the life of Balaam. Three times the donkey refused to go forward. At first he diverted in a field, then in a narrow area turned against a wall injuring Balaam’s foot, at last dropping to the ground refusing to carry Balaam forward any further. Each time Balaam responded by beating the donkey, whereupon the beast of burden replied verbally.

THE LESSON

There are prophetic lessons in the story of Balaam that pertain to the Church of Pergamos, but of course all the lessons for each stage of the Church have something of value for each Christian. We should not be turned aside by wealth, worldly honors, or esteem of others, from seeking chiefly the will and mind of God. “He that has learned to see nothing but the will of God shall always find what he seeks” (R966). But he that is allured by worldly things risks loss of the spiritual treasures of far greater value.

During the third phase of the Church, this did happen. After the pains of persecution in the Smyrna period eased, Constantine, whose mother was Christian, tendered earthly honors to the leaders of the Church. In return he wished their cooperation in his goal of a unified political domain. To accept relief from persecution was wonderful. But to engage in the politics of this world was a dangerous diversion from the spiritual interests regarding the coming kingdom.

The donkey that Balaam rode represents the teachings that carried the Church forward. The sweet instruction of the scriptures had served the saints well for a long time. But during the Pergamos period those teachings would not take the Church where some of her leaders wished to go — just as Balaam’s donkey would not take him where he wished to go.

“The angel of Jehovah stood in a path of the vineyards” (Numbers 22:24). This was an appropriate place to remind us of Jesus’ followers, for he is the vine, and we are the branches (John 15:5). When the donkey saw the angel, he refused to go further. But Balaam, blinded as it were by his desire to push on, was oblivious. In his anger, he smote the animal, leading it to speak in remonstrance, “What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?” (Numbers 22:28). Possibly the mention of three times has some connection to the fact that the episode relates to the third period of the Church.

Balaam replied, “Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee” (Numbers 22:29). This may suggest that the Church by this point had lost the “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17). The Truth had measurably corrupted already by this time, and Christians had now become embroiled in disputations over continuing corruptions that resulted in the false teaching of the trinity.

As the story unfolds, Balaam is allowed to go forward on the pledge that he would only speak what God would give him. Time after time when Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, he could only bless them, aggravating his benefactor, Balak. At last Balaam found a means of satisfying Balak’s wishes to bring a curse on Israel, by seducing the Israelites with pagan women. This seduction led many of the Israelite men to join in pagan festivals, and these sins are referred to in Revelation 2:14, “Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

Spiritually, this refers to the idolatry of earthly things and the illicit union with this world’s political affairs. Many Christians succumbed. As the developing Church of God began growing in earthly prosperity, honor, and authority, they became proportionately corrupted and this ultimately led to the establishment of Papacy as an apostate but powerful system that acted against the true saints of God.

In Balaam’s day, 24,000 Israelites perished because of their infidelity, and ultimately Balaam himself lost his life when Israel pressed forward (Numbers 25:9, Jude 1:11). This large loss of life probably represents the loss of spiritual life by those who left their spiritual aspirations for earthly attractions.

BALAAM’S PROPHECY

While Balak was seeking to induce Balaam to curse Israel, one of Balaam’s utterances, through the Spirit of

God, predicted things to come that indicated the success Israel would achieve in later times. “He ... saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab ... And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city” (Numbers 24:16-19).

Evidently this is a prophecy about Jesus and his ultimate victory centuries after the days of Balaam, thus his expression, “Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!” (verse 23). The star Balaam mentions reminds us of the Star of Bethlehem that signaled the birth of Jesus. The victory over Moab and Edom perhaps represents the ultimate victory of Jesus over the political and religious segments of apostate Christendom, which rose during the Pergamos phase and ruled mightily during the Thyatira phase of the Church. Moab’s king was Balak, the king who hired Balaam, and Edom is thought by many brethren to represent Christians who have sought out earthly things, a bowl of pottage as it were, while giving up their spiritual heritage. These two branches of Christendom — political and religious — persecuted the true Church during the age, and this prophecy points to their eventual demise under King Jesus.

King David was a lesser and more ancient fulfillment of these texts. David is notable for the “star of David” that is an emblem of united Israel. In 2 Samuel 8:2 David is said to have subdued Moab, and 2 Samuel 8:14 speaks of his having subdued Edom. In this David was an example and picture of Jesus, the “son of David,” who would fulfill the passage in a fuller way.

— Br. David Rice

Six Lambs

“And the burnt offering that the prince shall offer unto the LORD in the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish” (Ezekiel 46:4).

This text is part of the nine chapters that constitute the vision of Ezekiel’s Temple (Ezekiel 40-48). The vision is about the Millennial Kingdom, and the blessings of life that will flow to the world as they approach God during the Millennium. The vision refers to four classes of persons that pertain to the administration of the kingdom:

- (1) Priests (Church)
- (2) Levites (Great Company)
- (3) Prince (Ancient Worthies)
- (4) People of the land (World)

Three of these (priests, prince, people) are mentioned in chapter 46, which is the chapter we focus on in this

article. The chapter opens by discussing two particular days during which the people of the land will have access to the temple, representing the dwelling place of God.

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened” (Ezekiel 46:1). The six working days with closed gates evidently represent the 6000 years of sin and death during which the world does not have free access to God. But on the sabbath day, the seventh day, representing the Millennium of rest and sabbath for the world during the Kingdom, the people will have full access to approach God in praise, worship, and thanksgiving.

The gates are opened as well on the day of the new moon, suggesting that this day also represents the Millennial Kingdom, but from a different point of view. The moon represents things pertaining to Israel. A new moon is a dark moon, prepared to wax and expand day by day. This symbolism suggests the beginning of the Kingdom, from which time God’s blessing of Israel will continue to increase. This is in contrast to the time Israel was cast off at the full moon of Passover season when they rejected Jesus and their favor subsequently waned, growing dark.

Thus the Kingdom will be a day of rest from sin for the world, and a day of increasing favor for Israel, at the center of that Kingdom. Verse three says, “The people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before Jehovah in the sabbaths and in the new moons.” This illustrates that the world of mankind will come to serve, honor, and thank Jehovah for all his blessings (James 1:17).

Verse four says that on these days the “prince” will make offerings for the people. If the “prince” represents the Ancient Worthies (suggested by Psalm 45:16), then we see here their participation in a leading role as they officiate in the world’s approach to God. This is shown as well in verses eight and nine.

Verse 8 — “And when the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of that gate, and he shall go forth by the way thereof.” The prince is mentioned first, illustrating that the ancient worthies will be the first ones among men to bring their praise and worship to God when the kingdom opens.

Verse 9 — “But when the people of the land shall come before Jehovah in the solemn feasts, he that enters in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that enters by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it.” Perhaps this shows that the world will be encouraged not to backtrack in their movement toward God. Whereas the Ancient Worthies, who have measurably demonstrated their loyalty to God already, will be free to use the gate of their access, for their regress as well.

Verse 10 — “And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth.” This depicts that the Ancient Worthies will be in their midst as leaders and teachers of the world, showing them how to approach God and honor Him.

MEAL OFFERING

Verse 11 — “And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meat [meal] offering shall be an ephah¹ to a bullock, and an ephah to a ram, and to the lambs as he is able to give, and an hin of oil to an ephah.” This is unusual. In the sacrifices under the Law, the customary meal offering to accompany burnt offerings was always some fraction of an ephah — one tenth for a lamb, two tenths for a ram, three tenths for a bullock (Numbers 28:12, 13).² But here it is a full ephah.

A meal offering was an offering of thanks and good will from the offerer, to express their appreciation to God. It could be prepared in any way the offerer wished, as though to suggest that acts of thanksgiving and appreciation to God may be of in various ways that are suited to our situation, talents, and opportunities (Leviticus 2:1-7). The fact that in the Kingdom these are a full measure — a full ephah, rather than a fraction — suggests the full ability of the individual to show his appreciation by activity, zeal, and obedience, undiminished by the influence of sin and imperfection. That was the case when offering a bullock or a ram. But for offering the lambs, the standard was different: “as he is able to give.” We will return to that in a moment.

BURNT OFFERINGS

There were three essential kinds of offerings under the Law: burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings (thank offerings were a kind of peace offering, and trespass offerings were very much like sin offerings.)

The daily lambs in the temple were burnt offerings, representing the death of Jesus as our Ransom sacrifice. One lame was offered early in the day, and another later in the day, picturing that Jesus was put on the cross in the morning and died on the cross in the afternoon.



Six Lambs

The law for burnt offerings stipulated that they were to be put directly on the wood, which was placed on the coals, which were on the altar (Leviticus 1:8). Burnt offerings could be from the herd or the flock, they were always to be male, without blemish, and they provided atonement (Leviticus 1:2, 3, 10, 4).

All of these requirements cooperate to make a good picture of Jesus' sacrifice as our Ransom. He was of the highest type of offering (male), he was perfect (without blemish), he died on Calvary's cross (wood), and his sacrifice provided atonement for all. We sometimes associate the thought of acceptance with a burnt offering. This thought is consistent with the burnt offering representing the Ransom, as the Ransom is the fundamental offering that makes all others acceptable to God.

SIX LAMBS FOR A BURNT OFFERING

Ezekiel 46:4 says that on the sabbaths and new moons the prince was to offer six lambs as a burnt offering. The lamb reminds us of Jesus, the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But why were the lambs six in number?

This number of lambs is also unusual. In the offerings of the Law there were often seven lambs given as a burnt offering. The book of Numbers says that the Israelites were to offer seven lambs on the following occasions — new moons, the seven days of unleavened bread, Pentecost, the feast of trumpets, the day of atonement, and on the eighth day conclusion to the feast of tabernacles. Some of these occasions picture the Gospel Age, some the Millennial Age, and in both ages are fulfilled the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, the oath bound covenant. Seven lambs are appropriate to these occasions because the word "seven" (*sheba*) also signifies "oath," to indicate a complete obligation by the one undergoing an oath.

Thus the instruction in Ezekiel 46:4 that "six" lambs should be offered stands out conspicuously. Probably six are used here to show that these six lambs are given on behalf of the imperfect world of mankind (pictured by the people of the land), to show their appreciation for the Ransom sacrifice that Christ gave to release them from 6000 years of sin and death. In this regard, the six lambs remind us of the six working days of Ezekiel 46:1 during which the gates of access to God were closed.

SIX USED FREQUENTLY IN EZEKIEL

Upon noticing these sixes, we observe further that the number six is employed abundantly in the vision of Ezekiel's temple, as though to show that the whole temple arrangement was intended for the blessing of the world that lies under the curse for six millenniums. Here are other examples of the number six in Ezekiel.

All of these sixes have something to do with redeeming, rescuing, or measuring the fallen world of mankind incident to their blessing in the Millennial Kingdom.

Examples of the Number Six in Ezekiel

- The measuring reed was six cubits (40:5)
- Several six cubit measures (40:12)
- Some of the posts measured six cubits (41:1).
- A door and wall measured six cubits (41:5)
- The chamber foundations were six cubits (41:8)
- The what oblation was a sixth of an omer (45:13)
- The early offering was a sixth of an ephah (46:14)
- Ezekiel's drink was a sixth of a hin (4:11)

Here are compatible uses of the number elsewhere in the Bible

- Jesus suffered on the cross for six hours
- Keturah's sons were six in number
- Servants served for six years

A meal offering was to accompany each of the six lambs. However, unlike other offerings in Ezekiel, and unlike the offerings under the Law, the quantity of meal in these meal offerings was not stipulated. It was "as he shall be able to give" (Ezekiel 46:4). The same verse says that oil was to be added to the meal offering at the rate of a hin per ephah. A hin is perhaps 20% more than a gallon, so both the meal offering and the oil accompanying it would be valuable supplements.

The flexibility that the meal offering is "as he shall be able to give" shows that the world of mankind during the Millennium will be at various levels of development, and thus at various levels of ability regarding offering to God. In the beginning of the Kingdom, their offerings of cooperation and service, expressing their thanks to God, may be relatively small until they mature in faith. But God will accept in a positive light whatever steps they are able to make in the right direction.

ONE RAM FOR A BURNT OFFERING

A Ram is a mature male sheep. Inasmuch as all burnt offerings were to be males, the difference between this ram, and each of the six lambs, was age. The six lambs offered show mankind's appreciation for the ransom of the imperfect world. So the single ram, by comparison, seems to pertain to some class that is more developed and mature. Perhaps the ram pertains to the Ancient Worthies, the "prince" class that will direct the world during the Millennium.

A BULLOCK FOR A BURNT OFFERING

Six lambs, and one ram, were to be offered both on the sabbath days and on new moon days. But on the new moon days, an additional burnt offering was stipulated, namely a

“young bullock.” The designation “young” suggests that a bullock is not necessarily young. A bullock a bull, that is, a male from the herd. Why was a young bull given on the day of new moon, but not on the sabbath? Evidently this has something to do with Israel as distinguished from the world, for the Millennial Sabbath day applies to everyone, but the day of new moon applies specially to Israel.

A bullock was a prime animal. It was used as an offering in connection either with a priest — for the priest was the highest category of servants of God — or a congregation of God’s people. (See for example Leviticus chapter four, where a bullock was used for a priest or a congregation, but a goat was used for a ruler or a common person).

During the Kingdom, the church will be the priests of God, and they already will have been glorified and rewarded. Their faith and character will not be subject to trial then. So a connection of a bullock with a priest does not seem fruitful in Ezekiel 46. Evidently the bullock here pertains to the “congregation” of Israel, the covenant people of God used to extend Kingdom blessings to the world. The bullock for a burnt offering in Ezekiel 46:6 reminds us that Jesus’ died in a special way for the Jewish people, to redeem them from the Law and give them another opportunity to become the people of God.³

Because this bullock links to Israel, it was offered on the day of the new moon. Because it does not link specifically to the world at large, it was not offered simply on a sabbath day. Israel is of higher stature than the world — not individually, but collectively — inasmuch as they will be a vehicle through which blessings will flow to the world (Zechariah 8:21-23).⁴ Thus the world is linked in symbol to the high point of a week, whereas Israel is linked in symbol to the high point of a month.

— Br. David Rice

(1) According to Wikipedia, an Ephah is about 9 to 10 gallons. (But estimates vary considerably, some as low as about five gallons.) Ezekiel 45:11 says “The ephah and the bath shall be one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer.” The homer (10 ephahs) is not to be confused with the omer (one tenth of an ephah, Exodus 16:36).

(2) The King James version says so many tenths of a “deal,” but the NIV and NASB versions give the word “ephah” to supply what they understand the main unit to be.

(3) The two lambs given daily in the tabernacle and temple probably represent the death of Jesus for the Jews and Gentiles, the two parts of humanity that Jesus died for. Jesus was put on the cross in order to free the Jews from the deepest burden of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The time Jesus was put on the cross was 9 am, the same time that the Pentecostal blessing came to the Jews of faith (Mark 15:25, Acts 2:15). Jesus died at 3 in the afternoon, the same time the blessing came to the Gentiles (Acts 10:3, 30).

(4) Individually, one’s standing before God depends on one’s faith toward God, not to one’s descent, heritage, or culture (though the latter may influence the former). There will surely be good Gentiles of faith at the outset of the Millennium who will excel many individuals in Israel. Individually, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). However, there are certain national blessings for Israel, because “they are beloved for the father’s sakes” (Romans 11:28).

The Specialness of the Tribe of Levi

“Thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony ... and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle” (Numbers 1:50).

Background — Following the Exodus from Egypt, Numbers chapters 13 and 14 recount that twelve spies, one selected from each tribe, were sent out to reconnoiter the Promised Land. Ten of the twelve spies brought back a bad report about the military strength of the peoples of the land. It was a report based on fear and lack of faith. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, brought a faithful perspective and encouraged the people to go up in the strength of God and take their inheritance. The congregation of Israel accepted the bad report and for that faithlessness they were judged by Jehovah and condemned to wander the wilderness for 40 years, excepting Joshua and Caleb who trusted that God would give them the land as He promised. Were Joshua and Caleb the only ones who survived to go into the Promised Land?

Premise — The Tribe of Levi was exempt from the judgment on the rest of the nation to die in the wilderness

Observation (1): Judgment was on those numbered (Numbers 14:29). But the tribe of Levi was specifically not numbered. “Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sums of them among the children of Israel” (Numbers 1:49).

Observation (2): The tribe of Levi was not represented in the spies (Numbers 13:2-16).

Observation (3): Judgment was upon the “men of war” (Joshua 5:4-6). But Levi was exempt from military service and therefore not “men of war.”



The Levites had special privileges of service.

Observation (4): Levi was a particular example of loyalty (Exodus 32:26).

Observation (5): Eleazar the Priest is an example of this exemption. He is first seen in Exodus 6:25, coming out of Egypt with his sons. Exodus 28:1 says that he served as a priest. He must therefore have been older than 30 (Numbers 4:3). Finally, we find him alive and working with Joshua in the promised land (Joshua 14:1, 17:4, 21:1, 24:33).

Conclusion: Levi was not one of the twelve tribes of Israel that came under the judgment for their lack of faith and was therefore probably exempted from the punishment.

They were the special possession of Jehovah and had a special service in the Tabernacle (Numbers 3:5-9,11,12). This service was taken over from the responsibility that had previously attended the first-born male of each family. A special census was taken of the Levites in this chapter in order to process a special redemption of the first born for the Levites (Numbers 3:40-51).

Because the Levites were not part of the 12 tribes that had land inheritance, where did the Levites live? According to Numbers 35:1-8, they lived in 48 Levitical (which included the six cities of refuge).

We recognize in Levi a type of the church of the spirit begotten, with the priestly family of Aaron representing the overcoming church and the non-priestly Levites representing the Great Company. Both classes have consecrated their lives to God, giving up their earthly inheritance promised in the ransom.

— Br. David Stein

Sources of Abraham's Faith

Abraham was a wonderfully faithful man. He is referred to as the father of the faithful. "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). But one might ask, where did Abraham get this wonderful faith? There are at least three possible sources.

(1) FROM PROMISES TO HIS FOREFATHERS

Paul defines faith as, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In other words, faith is seeing things promised tomorrow, in your hand today. But a promise is required for there to be faith. So what promises did Abraham have and know about? There were at least three:

In Eden: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Galatians 3:15).

To Enoch: "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh



Father Abraham

with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 1:14, 15).

To Noah: "I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you ... neither shall all

flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. ... I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. ... The bow shall be in the cloud ... that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Genesis 9:9-16).

Some of these promises were vague. For instance, what is the "bruising" about in the Edenic promise? No one knew exactly. But the framing of God's word there made clear that the culprit in the fall of man in Eden would be dealt with by someone in the line of Adam — the seed of the woman. How and when? Who knew? But for a believer in God, this promise was sufficient to trust that God was somehow going to sort it out.

The prophecy of Enoch was even more pointed in this hope. He preached clearly that evil and evil ones would be brought to justice by the Lord and his saints who come for that very purpose. Again, the prophecy raises more questions than it answers. But the promise of a coming deliverance from evil was a good basis for the faith of Abraham and others who worshipped Jehovah.

The promise to Noah was a covenant between Noah and his seed. As the seed of Noah, Abraham saw himself already in a covenant relationship with his God. Since the Creator valued faith, Abraham could conclude, by extension, that if he had faith like Noah, he also could have a close relationship with God, perhaps even a personal covenant relationship.

These are the seed thoughts of faith. Although he had only a few promises in that early time, they were sufficient to understand what God required. Consequently, Abraham, by these promises, began to develop his own faith.

(2) FROM HIS ANCESTORS

Most of us learn things by being taught by others. Abraham learned faith by seeing it in others and hearing about it from them, most notably his forbearers. Notice whom Abraham could have seen and talked to. Here is who was alive when Abraham was age 30 years:

Patriarchs who overlapped Abraham

Name / Age when Abraham was 30 / Overlap

Shem	480 years old	150 years
Arphaxad	380 years old	88 years
Saleh	345 years old	118 years
Eber*	315 years old	175 years
Peleg	Died 12 yrs. before Abraham was born	
Reu	Died when Abraham was 17	
Serug	219 years old	41 years
Nahor	Died 11 yrs. before Abraham was born	
Terah	160 years old	75 years

* Eber outlived Abraham by four years.

The Bible does not tell us which of these patriarchs Abraham spoke with. But who would not want to talk with Shem, the true patriarch of the family? Who would not want to hear first-hand about life before the flood and building the Ark, and being saved through the flood? Shem was surely a faithful man, having worked with his father on the ark. Probably he retold the story countless times through all of his generations. He was Abraham's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather! It is likely that much of Abraham's faith came from some of these fathers. Hearing first-hand accounts of God's power and works would surely have made a lasting impression.

(3) FROM ABRAHAM'S OWN DEALINGS WITH GOD

God's contacts with Abraham are recorded somewhat nonchalantly. "Now Jehovah said unto Abram" (Genesis 12:1, ASV). Was this the first time Abraham heard God's voice or had there been previous communication? The scriptures are reserved here. There is no record of astonishment in this first record of interchange between God and Abram. God simply told him to move and he moved.

Brother Russell made an interesting suggestion in R5206. "The Scriptures state that Abraham believed God, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6). God must have had some dealings with Abraham before he believed or there would have been nothing for Abraham to believe. Evidently God had had some communication with him before faith and trust could have brought him into even a tacitly justified condition."

Conclusion: Faith is built on promises (Hebrews 11:1). Abraham learned of God's past promises and the faith that his forefathers exercised. This provided a splendid background for Abraham's own wonderful faith to grow.

We do not doubt that God loved Abraham from the beginning and nurtured his love and faith for God as Abraham's life progressed. We may expect the same treatment in our lives if we are faithful to the promises

that God has given us. Our faith will grow and grow and we may become lights to assist the faith of others. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Hebrews 11:6).

— Br. David Stein

Locusts and John the Baptist

"John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

From time to time there are friendly discussions as to whether John the Baptist ate locust insects or locust bean (Matthew 3:4, Mark 1:6). One approach to resolving the question is to see how the Greek word for locust(s) is used in the rest of the Bible. If that is not sufficient to resolve the question, then see how other ancient writers used the word.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary notes that "The name of the insect was first applied to the carob bean." That could weigh in favor of John eating locust bean (carob bean, acacia bean).

Leviticus 11:22 declares four kinds of locust to be clean foods, acceptable for humans to eat. That eliminates a potential objection to John having eaten the insect kind of locust.



John the Baptist

The Greek word for locusts is *akris* (ακρις, singular) or *akrides* (ακριδες, plural). The word is used in only two other places in the New Testament. It is used symbolically in Revelation 9:3,7, where "locusts" come out of the smoke of the abyss. There they are likened to scorpions and to war horses with heads, faces, hair, teeth, scales, wings, and stinging tails of scorpions. In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, Exodus 10 also

uses the word to describe the locusts of the eighth plague, which ate up the two remaining crops of Egypt.

Thayer's Lexicon defines the Greek word as insect locusts, and not as carob bean. It is defined as "grasshopper, locust, cricket" by Liddell & Scott (unabridged).

Therefore, pending further information, the other usages of the word indicate that John the Baptist ate insect locusts and wild honey, however unappetizing it may seem to some of us.

— Br. James Parkinson