

An Exposition of
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An Exposition of The Book of Numbers as Delivered in A Series of
Messages to the Congregation of Sequoyah Sovereign Grace Baptist
Church, Cherokee, NC.

by
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

In 1978, Tim James sold his butcher shop in Ogburn Station, NC and moved with his wife, Debbie, to Cherokee, North Carolina. A small group on the reservation had invited him to pastor their church. Over 42 years later, Tim continues to pastor at Sequoyah Sovereign Grace Baptist Church.

For all of those years, Tim has preached expositively through books of the Bible, having preserved his notes in large three-ring binders. Although visitors to his home have seen them, none had read them. In 2018, a pastor friend asked Tim if he could use his notes for reference in his expositions through a book of the Bible at his church. Astounded at the narrative style in which he had written them along with their simplicity, he could not keep them secret. As a result, Tim has graciously given permission for his entire library of notes to be scanned and published.

You need not expect his expositions to be a lesson in history from the Old Testament, nor a list of goals for posting to your refrigerator from the New Testament. No matter the book or text reference on which you read Tim's expositions, Old Testament or New Testament, you will rejoice as you read of the glorious faithfulness and work of the Lord Jesus Christ for God's elect.

In simple but profound everyday language you will be comforted in reading of Christ's fulfillment of God's law on behalf of the elect. Whether you read his expositions of the Old Testament or New Testament, you will see the revelation of Christ, the justification of his elect through his imputed righteousness and the glorious liberty and freedom he has obtained for them.

In speaking of the true Christian experience of grace from his own experience of gospel freedom in Christ, Tim's writings may well cause you to pump your fist and declare, "That is me!" God's revelation of his electing grace in Christ has enabled Tim to write a commentary that captures the spirit and meaning of the Old Testament and New Testament alike—Christ is all!

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THE CHURCH

Numbers 1:2-3, 18; 2:17

Numbers 1:2, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls;

3, From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

Numbers 1:18, And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls.

Numbers 2:17, Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.

In Genesis we see the beginning of the prophecy of Christ and his people. The creation is a picture of the new creation. The making of man and his subsequent fall sets forth Adam as the federal head of fallen humanity, and as a figure of him who was to come, Christ, the federal head of the newly created race and his blood-bought people.

We see the Christ pictured in the light called forth, in the beasts slain and we see him in the promise of Genesis 3:15. We see the people of God called out from among the world in Abraham and the covenant of grace

pictured in the covenant that God made with him. We see the promised seed, Isaac, who typifies all those who are born of the Spirit. We see the confusion of human tongues at Babel so that God might bring his people to a singular language (Christ and his gospel). We see the manner in which the Lord bestows righteousness when Abraham believed God concerning the promised seed. We see divine election when God separated the darkness from the light and also in the birth of Jacob and Esau. We see the children going into Egypt, the picture of the captivity and enslavement of sin.

In Exodus we see the deliverance of God's people from sin by substitution of the blood of the Lamb. We see God's protection and guidance of his people with the cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night, each picturing Christ as he who is the light of the world blotting out our transgression as a dark cloud. We see the destruction of the prince of this world in the drowning of the Egyptian Army in the Red Sea. We see Christ the manna, Christ the Rock, Christ the High Priest, Christ the Tabernacle, Christ the sacrifice and Christ the mercy seat saving, caring for, feeding and sustaining his people. In Leviticus we see the people of God worshipping God in the sacrifices and ordinances of God.

And now we come to the fourth book of divine inspiration, and it falls into the logical order that God has established. Here we see God *numbering* his people, setting them to their posts. In the midst of them is the tabernacle where he dwells among them in his glory. This is the church gathered and its function in the world, represented by the wilderness. All the tribes were to be numbered except the tribe of Levi which was the tribe of the priesthood. The reason for this is that the other 12 tribes picture the elect of God in the church as to specific function while the tribe of Levi, in this instance represents the church (the spiritual priesthood) as a number that no man can number. (12+1=13 doesn't it? This is further proof of the perfection of this numbering. Levi was one of the 12 sons of Jacob and for

him not to be counted ought to make the number 11. But God counted Joseph as two tribes by counting Ephraim and Manasseh [Joseph's sons] as one each. Therefore, you have twelve tribes counted and one tribe representative of the whole, a numberless multitude.)

The major portion of Chapters 1 and 2 are taken up with the actual numbering of the tribes and the establishment of their position relative to the tabernacle (representative of the believer's function in the church; Ro. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12-12,15-16). One important note to remember is that the first tribe mentioned, in reference to position, is the tribe of Judah (the largest encampment, 186,000) from which sprang Christ as King and priest. Their position was east of the tabernacle, toward the rising sun, guarding the door or entrance into the tabernacle. Judah was first to move, led the nation, the first to set up camp, and established where the nation settled. This wonderfully pictures the truth that entrance into the presence of God for worship is through *the* Judah, the lion of Judah, and the root of David—The Great High Priest of God, Christ, the Lord.

I want us to look tonight at what goes on here in Numbers 1-2 as a picture of the church. I want to draw your attention to 4 verses in these two chapters, and particularly 4 words and 1 phrase that teach the doctrine of the church. When I speak of the church, I'm referring to the whole of the body of Christ (for whom he gave Himself), *all the elect of all ages*, those predestinated to be conformed to his image, called, justified, glorified and gathered into the fold, the fellowship of God and the brethren.

Concerning the Church:

1. The first two words are found in Chapter 1 and verse 2. The words are *sum* and *number*. The use of the two words together in reference to the same thing teaches that there was to be an *exact* number. The word *sum*

suggests the adding up of those included and that sum was the *number*, the final and exact tally. This of course pictures the church in that it is made up of an exact number, elected by God, and it is for that number that Christ bled, died and redeemed. When all is added up, there will be no more and no less. When tallied up, there was an *exact* number from 12 tribes. All for whom Christ died make up the exact number of all those whom he redeemed and are the same number that makes up the church.

There is a popular notion that plays on the sympathies of folks. It is usually the fodder of fake preachers and is used profusely at funerals and during invitations at the end of gut-wrenching spiels of sentimentality that produce dead men walking. These often blubber that if you don't decide for Jesus that there will be someone missing in heaven, and that there will be an empty space. No! With Israel there is a *sum* that makes the *exact* number, and when the roll is called up yonder, everybody on the roll will answer "present." They all will be *presented* and accounted for!

This is clearly set forth in the building of the temple in 1 Kings 6:7. Of course, the temple represents the body of Christ, the church, made up of lively stones, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, a temple which is the habitation of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the foundation laid by God and the chief cornerstone and headstone of that magnificent spiritual edifice built with shoutings of "Grace, Grace unto it."

Note that in 1 Kings 6:7 that two principles are declared.

1) The first is that every stone was cut in the quarry before it was put in the temple. This means several things. Primarily it means that each stone was cut to fit a particular spot before it was put in its ordained place. It also means that when *complete*, there were no empty places, no holes in the walls, and no stones left over.

2) The second thing to note is that no human sound of works was to be heard while it was being put together. This declares that the building of

the church was an act of God, and that he will get all the glory. The church is and always has been an exact number, the sum of those chosen, cut in the quarry of prevenient grace, out of every tribe, put in their exact place and making up an exact total; which was ordained by God.

2. The second word concerning the church is found in Chapter 1 and verse 3. It is the phrase “*all that are able to go forth to war.*” This specifically referred to those above the age of twenty who were equipped or able to do battle. This first reveals the church to be a militant body. This bunch ain't going to heaven on flowery beds of ease. They are warriors that are set for and engaged in the defense of the gospel. These, equipped with the sword of the Lord, and having put on “the whole armor of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

They do battle with Satan and his minions, for our Lord said the gates of Hell shall not prevail against his church. They also do battle *within* for the scriptures declare that though “they walk in the flesh, they do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” The marvelous thing about this army and the battles they must fight is this—the battle has already been fought and won by their captain, their leader the Lord, who is a man of war. “Comfort ye my people,” tell her that her warfare is finished.

The third word is found in Chapter 1 and verse 18 and has to do with being fit to serve or being suitable for the post to which you are assigned. The word is *pedigree*. This is not usually a word that we mongrels, we curs, we dead dogs would attach to ourselves. But every person in this

army must be able to establish a pedigree. These must establish their rightful place by declaring who was their father (v. 18). Do all the members of the church have a pedigree? Indeed, they do! (See: 1 Jn. 5:1, 3:9; Jn 3:6-8; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Jn. 3:1; Gal. 4:6-7; Ro. 8:14-17; Col. 1:12, Heb. 2:11; 11:16; 1 Cor. 1:30.) The children of God have the best pedigree.

4. The fourth word concerning the church is found in chapter 2 and verse 17. It is the word *standards*. Each tribe had a standard under which they gathered. Whether moving from one place to another or going into battle, they gathered under *their* standard. The standard or ensign of flag or banner was the focal point of the tribes. They were defined by it, recognized by it, and gathered round it. This is the picture of the church and its singular focus and object.

The standard of the church is Christ, Christ and his word, Christ and him crucified, the gospel. The church is defined by him, recognized by him, and gathered round him. To the church, he is the message, the means, the method and the music. It is not programs, activities for the youth, clubs, committees, boards, rolls, or any number of things propagated by so-called Christendom. It is *Christ* our standard (Isaiah 5:26; 11:10, 12; 18:3; 31:9; Psalm 60:4; SOS 2:4; Is. 13:2).

So here in the beginning of this book there is the church, made up of an exact number, yet one that no man can number, the army of God, equipped for the battle, all having the pedigree of their father's house, and all gathered around with eyes, ears, mind and heart fixed on their standard, Jesus Christ—the ensign and banner of the Church.

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

Numbers 3:5-7

5, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

6, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

7, And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

We looked at the church in our last lesson as the army of God. This army was of a definite number, all possessing a pedigree, and all gathered under the ensign, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this lesson we will look at the other aspect of the church.

Just as it is an *army* of warriors, it is also a *family* of worshippers. We will see that this is typified by the separation of the tribe of Levi for the purpose of keeping the charge of God for the congregation in the matter of all things pertaining to the tabernacle. Israel in the wilderness is a picture of the church in the world (1 Cor. 10:1-11; Acts 7:38). This, in and of itself, is a wonder. I want us to stop for a moment and consider this spectacle in the wilderness.

There were nations all around. They were resplendent with riches, goods, glorious edifices, powerful governments, great houses of worship, priests, counselors, seers, prophets, and ministers aplenty. In the midst of all this finery, all the things that so attract and enamor the world was this group of people and in the midst of them was the God of all glory, the one true and living God. This people were not a people of roots. They did not

put up houses and establish communities. They were nomads, just passing through.

Though the nations had received abundance from God, they knew him not. He gave them rain and sunshine, increased them with goods, gave them life and breath and they knew him not. All around he revealed himself in the grandeur of nature, his power and majesty clearly seen by the creation he had made, and they knew him not. Where is God? He is in the middle of the desert in the bosom of his people. How unlikely, how preposterous this seems to the world, that God's people reside where there is not a blade of grass, not a drop of water and no visible means of sustenance. There is just them and their God.

How shall they live? Shall they feed on air and slake their thirst with scorched sands of the desert? Where is the armory, shall they defend themselves with only the spears and arrows they can carry? Wherewith shall they be clothed? There is no Wal-Mart, no commissary? Where shall they go and how shall they find their way? There is no compass, no map, no outposts, no jerk-water stops! How shall they live?

The answer is simple! These people believe! The world cries “foolishness!” These people *believe*. There in their midst is God, and all human ciphering, all of man's mathematics, all endeavors of arithmetic go down the tubes. *There* is God and because he is with them, they have *all* things. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, faith is the evidence of things not seen.” They shall not only live but flourish, because God is there, rich in mercy and grace, owning the cattle on a thousand hills, the earth belongs to Him, all the fullness thereof and all that dwell therein... his name is Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will provide.” (See; Deut. 2:7; 8:4). “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

This is the church typified, this church in the wilderness. If you have any doubt listen to 1 Cor 10:11 again; “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon

whom the ends of the world are come.” This is the church in the world, separated unto God, exposed to the elements, and to the world a hopeless conclave of seemingly defenseless, dependent losers. But, you see, *God is there*. Christ is in their midst, dwelling among them. They go to bed at night without a single morsel in the cupboard and awake to the ground covered with manna from on High. They travel at the direction of God with no canteen on their side, and everywhere they go there is this rock that gushes with fresh water of life, and “that Rock that followed them was Christ.”

They walk by faith and not by sight, this church of the living God. Faith attaches itself to nothing that the world calls real, solid and true. Faith sees the unseen and embraces the invisible. Nature may cast its eye on the storehouses of Egypt and its taste-buds may long for the garlics and the leeks. But, faith feeds on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and finds in that delectable diet of heavenly sounds and syllables “a feast of fat things with wine on the lees and well refined.” The church in the world survives, yea thrives without a single hot dog supper, bake-sale, pledge, or church bazaar where people are finally able to get rid of things they no longer want or need. “Hey, hon', this old lava lamp is busted. That's OK, we'll donate it to the church bazaar—it'll be a lava lamp for Jesus.” How can the church survive? *There* is God, *there* is Christ and in him they are complete, having need of nothing.

The church is separated unto God, unto the gospel (Romans 1:1). All that are in that number are there because they have been chosen unto salvation, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, endued with the very righteousness of God, called, justified and glorified. Thus, they are “in the world but they are not of the world.” The world is used of God as the fiery furnace of trial and tribulation, of persecution and reviling. Being Satan's work area, he goes about seeking whom he may devour. He will taunt, accuse and sift, but the faith of the church will not fail, and in the end,

they will overcome the world by their faith. They will receive nothing from the world, seek no help from the world and ask for no discounts from the world as if God were destitute. They do not beg bread from the world. They are the sons and daughters of the King, children of God, joint heirs with Christ, kings and priests unto God, and all things are theirs. They look for a city whose builder and maker is God. Their citizenship is in heaven, their treasures are there also, where moth and dust will not corrupt and where thieves cannot break in and steal

The church is real. It is genuine! It is made up of sinners saved by grace, but sinners all, falling ten thousand times a day yet not utterly cast down. The church is made up of those who are not naturally fit to be in it (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The church is not an elite ecclesiastical society wearing fine robes and silver slippers, nor does it view the world through stained glass lenses, nor does it speak in milquetoast musings accompanied by seraphic smiles and outstretched hands.

In this menagerie of misfits are kings that have committed adultery and murder, disciples that have cursed and denied their Lord, brethren who have toyed with the law in opposition to the grace of God, wise kings who have fallen prey to the deceitfulness of riches, Apostles who differ at times to such a degree that they must cut ties and go their separate ways—in short, all manner of miscreants. What can be said of such a malaise of maladapted misanthropes? Only this—God is *there*, residing in them by his Spirit and they shall never perish. They are his church and he is in the midst of them. They are his garden enclosed. They are in his hand and none can pluck them out. He has given unto them eternal life, yea all things that pertain to godliness and life and they shall never perish.

Now in the midst of a world gone mad, in proximity to organized, self-sustaining religion, despised and hated, assaulted by life's troubles, walking among the businesses of so-called sanctity—the merchandisers of men's souls meeting in the mausoleums of death—there is this church, this

blood-bought body of Christ. The church, refusing to take part in the socio-political doings of the drops of the bucket, refusing to give any credence to the sanctimonious, self-righteous sands of the balance, speaking of things not seen, holding the world loosely and at arms length, seemingly making no dent in the immoral course of society, gathered here and there in insignificant little flocks, relying wholly on the Lord for food and sustenance, meeting to hear only one thing, to sing only one note, they embrace only one person and God is *there*.

The world exists only to serve the church, though they do not know it nor would be willing to do so if they did. But when all the church is gathered unto Christ, when the last sheep is placed upon the shoulders of the Great Shepherd and brought home to the fold with joy in the presence of the angels, a trump will sound and time and universe will be rolled up as a scroll, set afire with the word of God's mouth and melted with a fervent heat. When all things are made new, there will be living and residing on the new earth the church—and God will be there in their midst. They will worship then, and they worship now because they are all sons of Levi and their happy lot is not to own land and possess the things of this world. No! Their glad estate is to “keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.”

The church is in *this* world, right now, and Christ is in the midst of them. Rejoice and again I say rejoice. Who are they? They are Levites, priests, and lest you think they are somehow better than others, look at Genesis 49:5-8 to be addressed in our next lesson.



SOVEREIGN GRACE

Numbers 3:5-8; 8:5-7

3:5, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

6, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

7, And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

8, And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

8:5, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

6, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.

7, And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.

It is always important to remind ourselves as we read the accounts of the Old Testament that “all these things happened to them for types” (1 Cor. 10:11). All of the Old Testament teaches of Christ, his work and the people for whom the work of Christ was performed. In these two passages we have a picture of the sovereign grace of God in the salvation of the elect. The tribe of Levi is a type of the elect both in nature and in grace. They are the priesthood, in that they picture the elect of God, whom Christ

made righteous kings and priests unto God which is a part of their predestinated conformity to Christ who is their King of kings, their high priest, their Lord, and their righteousness. These priests are called a chosen generation and a royal priesthood. So, when we look at God dealing with Levi, we are seeing God dealing with the sinner saved by grace and appointed to the lofty place of service unto God to offer acceptable sacrifices by Jesus Christ.

The first thing we must see is Levi in *nature*. In doing so, we will see the *kind* of people who make up God's elect priesthood. Look at the characterization of Levi and his brother in Genesis 49:5-7. Jacob here was referring to the deceitful and murderous actions that Levi took against Shechem, the son of Hamor in Genesis 34. They were wicked, cruel, deceitful and full of self-will. Jacob being set forth as a type of the Holy God says that his honor could not unite with them. Nor would he enter into their secret. This is a picture of the relationship of the Holy God with sinful man. His eyes are too pure to behold evil, and he will in no wise clear the guilty.

There was another man in scripture that was known abroad for his fierceness and cruelty. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death for the gospel's sake.

He wreaked havoc in the church and went about to rid the earth of the name of Christ. He too was arrested in his career and put to the business of minding the tabernacle of God. His name was Saul of Tarsus, and after the grace of God came upon him, he wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." In another place he wrote "Unto me, who am less than the least of saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Both Levi and Paul are examples of what it takes to save cruel, fierce, wicked men. Only the

sovereign grace of God will suffice. By nature, we all have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Yet by grace, we have been declared righteous priests made fit for the service of God. All the elect are by nature vile, God-hating rebels. Destruction and misery are in their ways. With their mouth they have used deceit. The poison of asps is under their tongue. But, glory to his name, God has visited them in sovereign mercy, and by the accomplishments of his Son, has made them priests. To see the glory of sovereign grace, you have but to see the difference between the description of Levi's position in nature in Genesis 34 and his position in grace in Numbers 3.

How is it that God brings such a sinner from the dunghill to be seated among princes? For that we need to look at

Numbers 8:5-7, “Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

On what ground can God, being just and holy, bring such a one to be his honored priest? Note well that Levi did not *volunteer* for the job. He did not make a move toward God. In nature he wanted to be as far from God as he could be. He was chosen by God and brought to God, “but of God are ye in Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Levi's self-will had no inclination toward God and no affinity to cause him to want to approach unto God. Ah, but grace had designs on him. God had both inclination and affinity toward Him, and God's self-will caused Levi to come. “Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee.”

In verse 7 we have a clear portrayal of the principle of divine cleansing. God uses two things in the means of Grace. These two things represent the work of Grace. *Washing* or *purifying* and *shaving* picture the work of Christ in cleansing the sinner by his precious blood through his word, and the cutting off that which grows by nature. How wonderful is the word of God! We are cleansed by the washing of the water of the word, and the Spirit of God has dominion over the old nature. The shaving of the hair so accurately depicts mans nature; even as he has been saved by grace, it still grows back. The shaving of the hair teaches us that nature is never involved in the service of God.

It also teaches us that nature cannot be reformed because it keeps growing back. It must be cut off and that by the razor of the Spirit, the double edged sword of the Lord, which pierces “even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Nature will never, never, never improve! Only the razor will keep it in check. Sin shall no longer have dominion over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.

One of the first lessons the Spirit of the Lord teaches is that your nature is judged, condemned and sentenced to death. Know this! Whatever is produced by nature is condemned by God and will never be used in the service of the priesthood. Is not this the initial declaration of believer's baptism? (See; Romans 6:6-11; 8:12-13). You are purified by the blood of Christ and made righteous by the divine act of imputation, but there remains in you a disgusting principle that were it not for God's razor, would grow to the full length of its depravity.

The washing of the clothes is representative of self-judgment or the condemnation of our nature from our own heart. It is temperance and moderation; it is a personal, continual reckoning that the old man is dead. We are priests, Levites and must cross the line drawn in the sand and find

ourselves on the Lord's side. Then we must put our swords on our sides and go out to slay everything about us that would worship the golden calf, the idols manufactured by our flesh and our nature. It's the *water* and the *razor*. It is purifying yourself even as you *are* pure, hating even the garment spotted with the flesh.

Now look at verse 8. Here, both a sin offering and a burnt offering symbolized the life of the priest. Both represented the death of Christ as the Lamb of God. Yet, each had a different distinction as to the believer's confession of faith. The burnt offering pictured Christ fulfilling the will of God and his voluntary sacrifice for his people. It showed that Christ's work (when he was made to be sin) in his death had accomplished God's will in the salvation of the elect.

This work was between God and his Son, and it resulted in the full acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, to the full satisfaction of God. Christ being accepted (fire represents justice satisfied), it followed that all who were in him were accepted by God also. This offering pictures acceptance before God that was wholly accomplished by another. The believer placed his hands on the head of the offering but did not confess his sin. The act of placing his hands on the head of the sacrifice was identifying with Christ's accomplishment and God's acceptance of Christ. He was saying that the merits of the sacrifice were transferred to him. He was, by this act, saying that he was accepted before God. He was confessing that he was accepted.

The sin offering also represented the death of Christ but differed in that it represented the sins of the believer being put away by the sacrifice of Christ. Here the believer put his hands on the head of the sacrifice to symbolize his sins being transferred to the victim. The *sin offering* was a confession of sin with the knowledge that God was *just* to forgive sin because he had already accepted the *burnt offering*—and them in it. The sin offering was for those who were already accepted through the merits of the burnt offering. Only those who are trusting the merits of Christ,

believing they are accepted wholly upon those merits, are qualified to confess their sin to the God who is just to forgive them.

Finally note the order of the sacrifices in v. 12. Here the sin offering is first mentioned and then the burnt offering. This is the reverse of their revelation. In Leviticus we find the burnt offering in Chapter 1 and the sin offering in Chapter 4. This is a sweet reminder that all of salvation was accomplished by Christ alone. Thinking on this order listen to 2 Corinthians 5:21. It says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Do you see the order? Our sin transferred to Christ, his righteousness (our acceptance) transferred to us. Ye sons of Levi rejoice.

And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity (Malachi 2:4-6).

"And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again (Deut. 33:8-11).

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Numbers 5:1-3

- 1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
- 2, Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead:
- 3, Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.

I have entitled this lesson *Church Discipline* because this passage, as well as several others in the Word of God, is used for the purpose of what is commonly called church discipline, especially the practice of excommunication, shunning or the more local phrase of “churching.” At the outset, let me assure you the phrase “church discipline” and the word “excommunication” are absent from the word of God—they simply are not to be found. The word “discipline” is found once in scripture in Job 36:10 and means correction or chastisement, and its design or intent is that of restoration, not dismissal. This discipline was administered by God and not his people in the context in Job.

The word “correction” is found once in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 3:16-17. There, “correction” is accomplished through the preaching and hearing of the word of God. I firmly believe that most of the ideas of so-called church discipline come from the concept of the local assembly being in and of itself the totality of “the church,” and that no such thing as the church-aggregate or the universal church exists. The body of Christ then, is seen only in locality and not seen as *all the elect*

from all ages. Thus, the practice of purifying the church falls in the hand of counsels, boards, committees, the body politic, or the voting congregation. I do not doubt the sincerity of those churches in their efforts or motives to be morally clean, but the methods employed are simply not scriptural.

This thinking often ends up in the measure of the purity of the church being in how *few* members they have. Humanly speaking this works well for the pastor, because a small number is easier to control, though his job description does not involve control. I have heard many a pastor brag on how many have been dismissed and of how the blessed remnant that remains are true believers. Such practices do not diminish the desires of every assembly to live morally and righteously in this world and to the best of their ability seek to not have “sin in the camp.”

No true church sanctions vile behavior, and the Lord has set in order that which the church is to do in response to a member who is out of the way and living in open sin. By the same token, the church does not turn itself into a court of justice to mete out punishment, nor does it become a forum to put the erring one in the public stocks of confessing before the body. Such commonly accepted practices find no support in scripture. Surely the most heinous of crimes against the body of believers is heresy and sowing discord among the brethren. Such must be summarily dealt with. They must surely be cast out of the assembly.

Does the scripture teach that such should be voted out, or “churched”? The place to find out is the scripture itself.

First look at the criminality of the offenses in Galatians 5:19-20. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies. The end of such things is that those who practice them “shall not inherit the kingdom.”

What shall the church do with such? Look at these scriptures:

Titus 3:10; “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.”

2 Peter 2:1; “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

2 Timothy 3:5; “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

Romans 16:17; “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

1 John 4:1-6; “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

Acts 20:28-31; “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

Matthew 15:14. “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”

In any of these cases, does the church excommunicate these individuals? Does the church actively deal with these people in a court atmosphere? Listen to the language. “Reject;” which means to avoid or rebuke; they bring upon themselves swift destruction; from such turn away; mark them; try them; prove them; watch and remember what you've heard; let them alone. The onus falls upon the believer, not to act in a legal manner but rather to refuse *fellowship* with such a one. The believer is to trust the Lord to deal with the problem, remembering the gospel and the fact that the difference will be manifest by God. One more verse; 2 Corinthians 11:19; “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. We'll consider more of these things later.”

All of that said was to simply remind us all that what we see in our text cannot be used in the manner that is commonly practiced and called “church discipline.”

Again, as we begin this study in Numbers 5:1-3, let us remind ourselves that “these things happen to them for types.”

Read again,

Numbers 5:1-3. “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.”

The first thing to realize, and it is a big thing, is the reason for dealing with these folks is that they are not to defile the camp “in the midst whereof I dwell” (v.3). This is about the glory of God and the honoring of his blessed name. This is not about regional taboos, personal convictions, petty whims or any such thing. The reason, the only reason, for dealing with these folks in this manner is the glory of God. So, at the outset, this is all about Christ, in whose face the glory of God is seen, in whose body dwells the fullness of God.

The reason these persons are put out of the camp is so that the glory and name of Christ be not *defiled* (which means *polluted* or *perverted*). How is a thing polluted? A thing is polluted by adding a factor to it, by communicating a disease to it, or by doing something to it. For example, a person’s actions are defiled because they come from a diseased and wicked heart. The disease pollutes the act (Mark 7). In Exodus 20:25, the altar was polluted by laying a tool to it, symbolizing man's works added to that of Christ's works and therefore polluting them. In Isaiah 48:11 God promises to redeem those he has chosen because they, being sinners, would otherwise pollute his name. In Galatians 1:7 Paul says that the Galatians had polluted or perverted the gospel by adding the works of the Law to it. The issue is the glory of God.

Something else is important to note. God says, “I dwell in that camp” (v. 3). He does not say that *if* these offenders are *not* removed that he would leave them, but that their *presence* in the camp would affect their *relationship* with him. Their *standing* with him is secure, he is in the camp. He dwells there. These are his chosen and redeemed people, and that by mercy and grace. Nothing in heaven or earth can change that (Romans 8:28-34). However, allowing these to remain in the camp, sanctioning their presence and refusing to deal with them would damage the fellowship that *they* had with *him* who dwelt in their camp.

A prime example of this is found in Joshua 7. There, Joshua went to battle against Ai and Israel was thoroughly whipped. As they fled from the men of Ai, they lost thirty-six men. Joshua, broken hearted over the loss, went before the Ark of the lord and cried to God for a reason for such a loss when God had promised the victory. God told Joshua that there was sin in the camp. Achan, an Israelite, had taken gold and silver from the spoils and hidden it away in his tent. Joshua found the cache and took Achan, his children, the gold and silver he had stolen, all his possessions and stoned them and set them afire. Then God gave Israel the victory.

The account of Achan's destruction in Joshua 7:24-26 reads, “And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.”

Note *where* this stoning and the erection of this great heap of stones occurred. It was the valley of Achor. Turn to Hosea 2:14-16. “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.” The valley of Achor is a door of hope. Why? Because there, where troubles are dealt with, the victory is assured. Note well that in verse 16, there is a change of relationship.

In looking at our text and seeing the purpose of dealing with these folks let us consider these people who are to be removed from the camp. They are (v.2) “every *leper*, every one that hath an *issue* and whosoever is *defiled* by the dead.” Here you have one disease, one condition and one act which are said to defile the camp. These three things are the three definitions of the human estate before God.

Psalm 32:1-2 reads, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” This describes the man whom the Lord has redeemed by his blood and righteousness. That which has been done for the *blessed* man is that his transgression (his act), his sin (his disease) and his iniquity (his condition) have been covered, forgiven and will not be charged to him. These three things ultimately define sin.

How then do these apply in reference to the church, her refusal to sanction sinful behavior and her willingness to summarily deal with it. The three kinds of folk with their respective conditions teach us a great deal.

Leprosy defines sin in many ways. It is incurable by any human means. It is debilitating in that it causes the appendages of the body to drop off and uniquely so. By the time an appendage drops off there is very little, if any, pain. The disease destroys the nerves which transmit pain.

The disease is progressive beginning with the presentation of a small red bump and progressing to full blown coverage of the body. The disease first destroys the internal aspects of the body and when the first red bump appears, the person is fully consumed, though it is not obvious.

The diseased person was declared clean by the priest when the disease was at its last stage when the whole body was covered with white scabs. This, of course reveals that only hopeless, ruined sinners are saved when they have no possibility of recovery, when their sin touches every fiber of the being. Only then the great high priest, who came to save the chief of sinners, declares them clean. This is alluded to by God in Isaiah 1:18 when he says, “Though your sin be as scarlet, they (your sins) shall be white as snow.” A brother or sister afflicted with what this disease typifies is one who has been consumed by a particular evil and is seemingly beyond all help. Do we sanction his sin, say and do nothing, or do we deal with him?

The person with the *issue* (Text v. 2) refers to the woman in her menstrual cycle. This condition as we learned in our studies in Leviticus was one that declared the woman to be *cursed*. Everything or everyone she touched, or was touched by, was declared unclean. She was banished from the camp until her cycle was complete and then allowed back into camp after seven days, but only when a blood atonement was made for her. Her condition pictured that person who, though often forgiven, yet continues to repeat the same offense over and over again, as typified by the monthly cycle. Such a one is a continual trouble to themselves as well as the church and will soon grow to the point of being suspect to all around them. Shall the church sanction such continual behavior, say or do nothing or shall the church deal with it?

The person who has defiled himself with the dead is a priest (a believer) who is mourning the dead. Priests were prohibited from doing this, except for immediate family members. Why? It is because they stood as representing God in this world, the God who is in control of all things.

To be mournful for the dead was to despair the providence of God. The believer is referred to in Thessalonians as not one “who sorrows as those who have no hope.” The sense in which this pictures a believer in sin is that it speaks of one who cannot let go of the things that are dead to him.

Now, the scripture is clear on what is dead to the believer. The believer’s former works of righteousness which he did to gain merit before God are dead to him (Hebrews 9:14). Such a one cannot let go of his assumed piety and mourns over the truth that nothing he does counts for righteousness. The scripture clearly teaches the believer is dead to the law and the law is dead to him (Romans 7:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:5-10). Such a one is the brother or sister who is morning over the fact that there are no legal rules to control behavior. They do not trust that love for Christ is constraint enough to govern the life and behavior of the believer. Such want to institute something to regulate behavior and punish offenders. Such are always suspicious of motive and create suspicion with words.

The scripture clearly states the believer is dead to the world and the world is dead to the believer (Galatians 6:14). The sin of such a one is that he or she is caught up in the idea of making a fair show of the flesh by constraining others to meet religious standards (v. 12-13). Their end and goal is to glorify themselves in their ability to change lives. Shall the church sanction such continual behavior, saying or doing nothing, or shall the church deal with it? These things must be dealt with or the churches fellowship will be damaged. These things do not change God's love and care for us, but they do affect our love and fellowship with Him.

Those who wish to apply so-called “church discipline” usually do so by forbidding the offending brother or sister from receiving the Lord's Table. Because of sin, the church takes the position that the offending brother is not permitted to fellowship with them or with God. They consider this to be “discipline” and they believe it to be scriptural. Their proof, they say, is found in 1 Corinthians 5:11. “But now I have written

unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.” They aver the words of this verse, especially the last phrase, teach that an offending brother should be prohibited from receiving the Lord's Table. There is a whole bunch wrong with this thinking.

First, the Lord's Table is an ordinance to be administered by the church. An ordinance is a command of the Lord. This particular ordinance is commanded to those who “examine *themselves*,” not to those who come under the examination of *others*.

Secondly, the criteria for taking the table is the spiritual understanding of the teaching of the elements (the bread and wine). The elements teach that Christ shed his blood and gave his body to be broken for sinners *and in that work fully and freely forgave all their sin*. For the church to prohibit a professing believer from receiving the table is for the church to prohibit that one from obeying God.

Thirdly, in reference to the “proof text,” in 1 Corinthians, it simply does not say that the offending brother is *not to eat*. If language means anything (and it does), it is the church who refuses to eat with him. They, as a body, say with their refusal that the offending behavior prevents them from fellowship with God—there is sin in the camp. This fits perfectly with the command to eat the bread and drink the wine. The command is mitigated with the words “as often as you do this.” It follows then that though the church may not prohibit the offender from receiving the Lord's Table, they may refuse the table in order to take it at a later date and do so without disobeying the ordinance of God. The Lord's Table is not a place of discipline, and it is a large stretch of the ecclesiastical imagination to try to make 1 Corinthians 5:11 mean that it is.

1 Corinthians 5:4, 5, 11, 12 is also used by church disciplinarians to support putting the offender out of the church.

4, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

11, But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12, For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

Using these verses many put the offender out of their assembly. I have always wondered how that is done. Do you post guards at the door, do you call out the sheriff, or do you beat the guy senseless? (All these things have been done in the name of fellowship and church discipline.)

The issue is this. Does this passage support such drastic measures? Verses 4-5 make it clear that the desire is for the brother to be *delivered from his offense*. This matter of turning the offender over to Satan is clearly for the purpose of his *recovery*.

The church is not giving up on the offender. Rather, they are giving up *personally* recovering him. Nor are they enlisting the help of Satan, but they are bowing to the fact that Satan is all over this fellow and decided to let this evil run its course while praying for the individual. Our Lord set such a precedent in Luke 22:31-32. Whatever the actions of the church in Corinth were, and whatever it means to deliver someone to Satan, it worked (See: 2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

Again, the language of 1 Corinthians 5:11 does not teach the excommunication of the offender. It does not say that he is to be kept from keeping company with the church but that the church is not to keep

company with him (compare verse 2 with verse 4 & 13). The church is not to pretend that all is well when it is not.

Matthew 18 is the biggest gun used by the disciplinarians. Using verses 15-18 they avow that the Lord is setting the church as a kind of court (Matthew 18:15-18).

15, Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16, But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17, And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18, Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Verse 17 is said to be the final step of discipline, bringing the offender before the church, tried and then put out. Nothing is further from the truth. They use verse 18 to say that this shows the churches authority over the offender by God backing up their actions. This verse actually reads “what you bind on earth shall have been already bound in heaven.” This is not God backing the churches action but rather the church fulfilling the purpose of God. The issue is *what is being bound* on earth by the church, according to the context.

The context of this passage is *conversion*. The Lord is dealing with his disciples about their attitude toward the brethren. They are bickering about who is going to be greatest in heaven. Now in order for one disciple

to be greater than another, the other must be less than the one who desires greatness. Our Lord reveals that they need to be *converted*. The word converted means “to be turned”—to be turned from their *thoughts* and *attitudes* toward their brethren. He calls a little child to himself and sets him in front of them. He then says to the disciples, in reference to their one-ups-man-ship, “you have to be turned into a little child.” This child is not interested in being the greatest. He is not interested in what seat he will have in glory, nor if it will be above someone else.

To be converted is to come when you are called, sit where you are told and be thankful that you have been included. “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:10). The word “despise” means “down mind” or to look down on a brother, which is what you would be doing if you wanted to be greater than he. The little believer's angels, sent to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation, do always behold the face of God. The allusion here is that the angels sent to guard the believer against harm watch the face of God for a change of expression. When God's expression changes, when one of his children is looked down upon, the angels fly to the despised believers rescue. Our Lord goes on to say to his disciples who have begun to think too highly of themselves that they were all lost when he came to save them, and they all have the same standing with God. Not one is greater than the other. None of his children shall ever perish, and when one of them trespasses, they are not to be approached in the attitude that they are somehow less because they have offended.

Our Lord then sets the course for their recovery. Remembering that the angels are watching the face of the offending brother's Father, verses 15 and 16 (Mat. 18) are to be accomplished. There seems to be a natural progression in vv. 15-16, and the design is to let the offender know that he is loved and his recovery desired.

Now look at the first phrase of verse 17; “tell it unto the church.” Now am I just goofy or is there truly nothing here about bringing the offending brother before the church. Try as I might in my, albeit limited, intellectual capacity, I find no way to make this phrase to mean the church sits as a court.

If you follow the progression of thought, it goes like this. The brother has offended, go alone to seek his recovery. If he hears you then you gained your brother. If he will not hear you, go back to see him with one or two others and seek his recovery. If he still will not hear you, *tell* the church, so that everybody in the body may go to the brother to seek his recovery. If after being petitioned by all his brothers and sisters to relent, he still remains in his offense, let him be as a “heathen man and a publican.”

Does this mean to cast him out? Is that what we do to the heathen and the publican? It certainly wasn't what the Lord did with them, was it? No, we treat them as if they have never heard the gospel and invite them to worship with us and preach the gospel to them. Our Lord was a friend of publicans and sinners. In vv. 18-19 our Lord as much as reiterates the reason that he spoke back in our text in Numbers 5 “in the midst whereof I dwell.” What follows is the question of a reasonable man. Peter wonders just how many times you have to forgive an offending brother. Read Mat 18:21-35.

The church is the family of God. It is never to sanction the offender's behavior but always to pursue the recovery of the individual, judging the offence as damaging to the church's fellowship with God. It is not the presence of the judged evil that pollutes, but the sanctioning of it. The church is jealous for its worship of God. It will countenance nothing that would hinder it.



THE NAZARITE

Numbers 6:1-21

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD:

3, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.

4, All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

5, All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

6, All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.

7, he shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

8, All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

9, And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.

10, And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

11, And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day.

12, And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

13, And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

14, And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings,

15, And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings.

16, And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering:

17, And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering.

18, And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings.

19, And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven:

20, And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine.

21, This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the LORD for his separation, beside that that his hand shall get: according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation.

This passage deals with the consecration of the Nazarite. There were different kinds of Nazarites in the scripture. Samuel was a Nazarite from birth and continued to be all the days of his life. He was designated as such by his mother Hannah. Samson was appointed to the life of the Nazarite by God.

As this oath belonged only to the Jews and not the Gentiles, other Jews could vow the Nazarite vow for any length of time. He or she could take the Nazarite vow for a day, a week, a year or for their full life. The passage we consider deals with this type of Nazarite.

This was a personal vow and was to be kept precisely according to the precepts that God laid down. During the time the person vowed to “separate himself unto the Lord,” he was not to drink anything that contained alcohol, or any product derived from alcohol. He was to eat no fruit from a vine. He was not to cut his hair for the duration of the separation, and he was not to have anything to do with the dead. Unlike the priest, who was obliged to refrain from funerals except for his immediate family, the Nazarite, during the time of his separation, was not allowed even to attend the funeral of his own father.

This was a *voluntary* vow and therefore declared that this did not have to do with acceptance before God, but rather had to do with inclination toward. The book of Numbers has a great deal to do with how what we do affects our relationship with God. The Nazarite made a voluntary vow to abstain from alcohol, cutting the hair and proximity to the dead for the duration of the separation. This spoke of dedication and consecration of their life to God, evidenced by living in a manner that was different from the rest of humanity. His life as a Nazarite was a life of separation. He devoted himself to God.

If the Nazarite came into contact with a dead body, even by accident, he was bound by his oath to start all over again. If he had vowed to be a Nazarite for a year and on the 364th day a man dropped dead beside him, he was bound, after offering the proper sacrifices and shaving his head, to start all over again and separate himself to the Lord for the full time of the original vow. This is seen in verse 12 in the last phrase “but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.”

This may seem harsh, but it is full of practical teaching. It is a life lesson, if you will. Though you, as a child of God by grace, have made no Nazarite vow, nor could you, you have nonetheless voluntarily vowed allegiance to Christ. You have voluntarily separated from that which is opposed to the gospel, refusing to touch the unclean thing (2 Cor. 6:14-18). You have been separated to the gospel by God himself (Romans 1:1). You have voluntarily given up any approach to God by the law. If it is not done voluntarily it is of no value at all. Your life belongs to God. Remember well, what is done cannot be undone. Many have failed and faltered and think they can undo it. Sin always brings forth death—always. In truth, all that was done before we fell, is lost. There is no use in trying to regain it. Shave your head, look to Christ and start all over. Forgetting those things that are behind, press on to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.

The day after the Nazarite made his offerings and shaved his head he was renewed in his vow. His hair might not get as long as it was before he fell, but length of the hair has nothing to do with it, only that no razor touch it. If it is just short stubble—you are still a Nazarite. The world around will know that you have failed; they may, most assuredly will, remember the fall, and discount everything before it. So, agree with thine adversary; start all over again. The moment you do you are fully established. Many a life has been ruined by living in the past. It is lost—don't spend yourself in the pursuit of a remedy for it. Be reminded again, however, that this is not about God's relationship with you, but yours with Him.

Isn't this the beauty of grace. No matter how horribly we fail and no matter how careless we've been, our standing before God is not based on anything we do or don't do but wholly on the merits of Christ. It is not the person that is defiled. It is his vow of separation that is defiled (v.12). We *can* start all over!

The Nazarite was a type of Christ. This is the real *heart* of the passage. Christ was not a Nazarite. He drank wine, touched the dead, raised them up and even tasted death. He made no such vow. He was a Nazarene. Whether he had long hair or not is of little value.

The word Nazarite and Nazarene both come from the word “Nezer” which means “crown.” The significance of the uncut hair was that it represented an unblemished crown. Our Lord wears the unblemished crown of *perfect* priest and king (Zech. 6:12-13; Rev. 19:11-16; Exodus 28:36-38; 29:6). Oh, blessed Nazarene, my king, my Great High Priest and my Prince of Peace!

He separated himself unto the service and honor of his Father (Luke 2:41-49; John 8:29; Isaiah 53:10; Luke 9:35; Hebrews 10:1-10). He pleased the father in his life and his death. He kept his vow as sacrifice, as surety, as mediator, intercessor and as the fulfiller of the law. He never

had to shave his head because he was innately holy, separated to God, among sinners yet without sin. His crown was never tarnished; his glory was never dimmed. He upholds his vow yet today as he ever lives to make intercession for us.

This is the meaning of the vow of the nazirite.

THE BLESSING

Numbers 6:22-27

- 22, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
23, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,
24, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
25, The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
26, The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
27, And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

Thus far in Numbers we have seen the church in the wilderness as the *army* of God and as God's *family* of worshippers. We have seen the manner in which the church maintains their relationship with he who dwells in their midst, and we've seen the teaching of separation. This portion of scripture concludes with the LORD Jehovah blessing the church. The church is the new creation of God and having established it, set it in order and given it the means of cleansing and maintenance. Declaring it holy, he now says, with this blessing, that all his creation is good.

This blessing, as are all blessings, is not conditioned upon anything done by the church. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings *in Christ*. All of our blessings are conditioned upon God being satisfied and happy with us. Thus, all our blessings are conditioned upon Christ and his work for us. These words are not presented as an offer or proffer. This is a

pronunciation, a declaration of the blessing of God. It is a declaration of God graciously bestowing upon the church his very presence.

This blessing is a revelation of God's heart toward his people. It is a blessing upon the people of God that comes through the church. It is to the priests that the LORD reveals the blessing. This blessing comes through the word, the *spoken or preached* word of God. Our LORD instructed the priest to say this to the people.

The blessing is sevenfold. It is a perfect blessing and must be so because it comes from him who is perfect. The language teaches us that this is a blessing of the gospel because all the things declared are found in the gospel of God's grace in Christ. This blessing is a word of extreme encouragement. Remember, the church is in the wilderness, in the world, this world, and is continually the brunt of the hatred of the world. Trials and tribulations are the order of the day, the way of life for everyone who names the name of Christ. It is not only given unto you to believe but also to suffer for his Name's Sake. If you are a believer, facing the cruelty of the world, the weakness of the flesh, the onslaught of the old man, this is what God has declared that you now possess. It is not conditioned upon your feeling, whether good or bad, your intellect whether great or small, your station in life whether stable or unstable. No, the LORD has said to the priests—"Tell this to my people."

Oh, for faith to believe it, to lay hold of it and to rest in it. This is yours by grace, yours by title and yours by relationship with Christ. There is never a time when this is not so, though we may often forget it. The remembrance of it is sweet and full of encouragements but not one morsel of it is contingent upon our remembering it. I am embarrassed and ashamed by how often I fail to recall the mercies of God, but my embarrassment and shame *in me* does not change the fact that his mercies are new every morning. I know *this*, that *since* this blessing is spoken, I

will be more apt to remember it as I avail myself to the preaching of the gospel.

Hear the sevenfold blessing from God:

1. *“The LORD bless thee.”* The word “bless” suggests that the Lord does that which is good for you and gives you that which you cannot by nature deserve. Blessings are things of grace. “Grace” means “an intentional, an intensive and deliberate act. The word “bless” is here in the imperfect tense which means that this is a continual process. God has *intentionally* blessed us and will continue to do so. In Jeremiah 32:40 our Lord promises “I will not turn away from them to do them good.”

2. The LORD *“keep thee.”* Years ago, I had a book by Frances Havergail. It was entitled *“Kept for the Master's Use.”* I don't remember much about the book, but the title has always stuck with me. I found early on, in my believing career, that I could not keep myself. I found every effort to do so was fraught with failure. I still find that true today. The blessing of God is that he keeps us—He alone keeps us (Jn. 6 :37-38; 17:12, 15; Gal. 3:23; 2 Peter 1:3-5). This is your blessing. You are kept by God (Psalm 121:3-4).

3. *“The LORD make his face shine upon thee.”* This specifically refers to the blessing of God's continual presence with his people. He is always with them and never leaves them (Ps. 139:7-18). This also has to do with continual enlightenment. The word “shine” alludes to the dawn when the sun breaks forth. This is the language of the word of God. It is the effect of the word of God on the hearts of his people. In their greatest hour of darkness, the word of God breaks the horizon and God's face shines upon them (Ps. 119:130; 2 Peter 1:19). This also speaks clearly of Christ and his gospel, in whose face the glory of God shines and who is the light of the world.

4. *The Lord “be gracious unto thee.”* The blessing of God is that his people receive abundantly from him what they could never deserve. They

have no merit, yet God gives them his unmerited favor. In salvation, from pole to pole, it is grace and grace alone. You are blessed with grace (Ephesians 2:8-10). You are established by grace which flows freely from the God of all grace.

5. *“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee.”* This is a sweet blessing and one which would dispel most of the myths of God holding the law as a threat over his children or that God's presence strikes a slavish fear in the hearts of his people. A *lifted countenance* is simply a smiling face. How precious this is to the falling and faltering believer. The blessing of God is that he has a smile for you. Look at the description of the gospel that Paul reveals to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:11. That word “blessed” means “happy.” We preach the glorious gospel of the *happy* God. He is happy with himself, with his Son and with his Son's substitutionary sacrifice. Because of that, he is happy with his people. Remember, this is not a conditional blessing but an intentional, intensive and continual blessing. He ever smiles for you. He has lifted up his countenance upon you. You have found grace in his eyes; you are righteous in his sight, and your sin and iniquities he will remember no more.

6. *The LORD—“give thee peace.”* In a world gone mad, this is a precious blessing. This peace is that which passes understanding and knowledge yet is wholly based on understanding and knowledge. The believer knows his LORD holds the reigns of this universe firmly in his hands. The believer knows that no weapon formed against him shall prosper. The believer knows all things work together for good for him (Is. 26:3). The sweetest knowledge is that Christ has made peace with God for the believer by removing all and every obstacle to peace. He has made peace by the blood of his cross. He has satisfied justice, consumed the wrath of God for the believer and all that is left from God for the elect is that smiling face.

7. *“And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel: and I will bless them.”* The name of God is upon you. He has signed his name to the artistry of making you a vessel of honor and mercy out of the lump of Adamic clay from which you were taken. He has put his name upon you because you are His. You are bought with a price. He has put his name upon you because you are his child. He has put his name on you because he as the perfectly holy God identifies with you (Rev. 22:1-5 [v.4]).

“Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel: and I will bless them.”



GOD REMEMBERS EVERYTHING

Numbers 7:1-9

1, And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them;

2, That the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered:

3, And they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle.

4, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

5, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service.

6, And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites.

7, Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service:

8, And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

9, But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.

Numbers 7, a lengthy chapter containing 89 verses, is the record of the 12 princes and their offerings given for the support and care of the tabernacle. These offerings were substantial and of great value and were given to the sons of two men who had the hardest tasks in the assembly and disassembly of the tabernacle. Three men are mentioned; Merari, Gershon, and Kohath.

Merari's job was to manage the pillars, sockets, pins and cords that held the linen curtains surrounding the courtyard of the tabernacle. He and his sons were assigned the task of keeping accurate records, an accounting of every item and bearing the items from location to location when the tabernacle was taken down and put back up again (4:29-33).

Gershon's Job was to bear and maintain all the curtains and various skin coverings, and that which held them in place as the tabernacle was moved (4:21-28).

Between Merari and Gershon were divided the offering of the princes; two wagons and four oxen to Gershon and 4 wagons and 8 oxen to Merari. The amount given was proportionate to the labor involved in the tasks. Both these men were involved with the exterior elements of the tabernacle.

None of the offering was given to Kohath, the reason being given that he and his sons were the bearers of the furniture of the tabernacle. They were the ones who put the golden staves in the rings. They bore the brazen altar (where Christ was the offerer and the offering that satisfied God), the laver (where the priesthood is cleansed from the defilement of the world through the washing of water by the word), the lamp-stand (Christ is the light of the world), the table of shew-bread (Christ is the bread of heaven who was pierced and is the food of the church), the altar of incense (Christ is the intercessor) and the ark of the covenant (Christ is the atonement, propitiation, mercy seat and the revelation of the glory of God).

The typology is clear. The Sons of Kohath picture the work of Christ. Whereas Merari, and Gershon picture the church needing the help of God and the help of each other, using natural things to carry on their tasks. They cannot bear their burdens alone. Kohath pictures Christ accomplishing the work of salvation *alone*. He suffered and died alone, bore our sins in his own body on the tree, by himself purged our sins, neither needing nor receiving help from anyone and needing nor receiving offering from men in order to accomplish the task before Him.

What follows in verses 12-83 is a precise and exact accounting, by God, of every item offered by these twelve princes. Every prince is named by name and everything that he gave is listed down to the last farthing. Since this is a very detailed accounting, we'll just read the account of one of the princes (vv. 12-17). Do you see how thorough the accounting is? It is the same with every prince and his offering. God kept the record of everything that his princes gave to him, every sacrifice they made—every offering. God remembered it all, and he did so in precise exactness. This is a wonderful encouragement to the believer concerning his good works.

The believer has difficulty speaking of his own works; he is much more comfortable speaking of the works of his other brothers and sisters. The reason for this is that all proclamation of personal virtue is suspect. Also, the believer is hard pressed to see anything he does as good. There is sin in all that we do, no matter how noble the intention or how taxing the labor (Romans 7:15-25). We know that the Lord declared that after we have done all our duty, we must confess that we are most unprofitable servants. We know that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. If we are pressed to honestly recall anything that we have done for God and his glory, we cringe for we know that all we do contains so much of self that we dare not claim it as worthwhile.

We also know that we are told to maintain good works, and indeed are ordained by God to walk in a life of good works. We know that our

giving is rarely sacrificial, for it flows from our abundance. We know our prayers to be, more often than not, little more than flowery phrases intended to impress God. We know that our love for God and for the brethren is frail, weak and often changes due to circumstance. What's a fellow to do? Look away. Look out yonder to the One who sits on the throne, who is the measure of all things and as he *accounts* a thing—that is precisely the way it is.

Look at these twelve princes, sinners all, and remember that God raised *you* from the dung-hill and set *you* among princes. And note well that the princes did not give an account, it was God. Also note that God remembered their offerings on an individual basis—“each prince on his day.” Every prince made his offering for the consecration and glory of the tabernacle on his day. This speaks of an appointed time, when your good works will be done. Now, you will endeavor to maintain them at all times, but your works are ordained of God and will be accomplished when its time. When will that be? God knows. You be about the business of worship, prayer and serving the people of God—God will do the accounting. But this is the good news; He will remember precisely, exactly and will account for every one of them. In the end he says to you, if you are his, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

While rich men cast large sums of money into the treasury, Christ remembered and calls it to our attention by writing in his book the record of the poor widow's mite. They gave of their abundance—she gave her life. She gave all she had, went home to an empty cupboard and lay down in the arms of him who had given her everything according to the riches of his grace. Christ remembered and used her as the example of what it is to give. The harlot who broke open the alabaster box of ointment and poured it on her Master's head to anoint him for his burial was despised by the disciples, but Christ remembered and fixed it so that all his people would *also* remember (Mark 14:3-9). Neither one of these women built a church

building, cast out a devil, nailed 99 theses to a church door or began a revolution. They did not sit at the synod of Dort and argue against Arminianism. They did what they could, and what they did is recorded in the everlasting word of God (Mat: 25:34-40; Mk. 9:41).

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” and as you abide in the true vine ye shall bring forth fruit and your fruit will remain. God remembers and he remembers every detail (Rom. 16:1-16).

God remembers everything, except his people sin! (Psalm 56:8; Hebrews 6:10; Revelation 2:2; 14:13)



THE LAMPSTAND

Numbers 8:1-4

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him, When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.

3, And Aaron did so; he lighted the lamps thereof over against the candlestick, as the LORD commanded Moses.

4, And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work: according unto the pattern which the LORD had shewed Moses, so he made the candlestick.

In studying scripture there are number of important rules to follow. The first rule is that this book is about Jesus Christ. It is about all the aspects of his person, work and the people for whom his work was performed. To veer from this path of interpretation is to miss the reason for study and to ensure the result of study will be of no avail (John 5:40).

Another rule is the rule of context. This involves who is speaking, who is being spoken to, the subject being addressed and the circumstances that brought about the statement or dialogue. Also involved in context there can be elements such as the culture of the area and time, governmental influence, religious influence and even flora and fauna.

Still another element of the study of scripture is the element of the anomaly. An anomaly is a departure or deviation from what seems to be a normal or common order. I used the phrase “what seems to be a normal or common order,” because such anomalies only seem so. In God's word

everything is in its proper order. What I have found is that when a passage seems out of place, it is best to treat it as if it was a “Selah,” a time to pause and ponder and then look at it as part of the context; which it is.

Here in Numbers 8:1-4 the candlestick (or lampstand) is introduced. The other elements of the holy place, the altar of incense and the table of shew-bread, are not mentioned. If they were, it would still seem to be out of order. This passage is placed between the record of the offering of the princes in Chapter 7 (which we saw was a picture of God remembering the works of his people down to the most minute detail) and the preparation of the priest that involved the shaving of his head as a picture of the despising of nature, though it continued to grow back. The nature is held in check by the razor of the word of God, pictured by the water of cleansing. Here, between the works of the believer and the subduing of the nature by the gospel, is the lampstand.

Before we look at the application of placing this passage here, let us stop for a moment and consider the lampstand.

The lampstand was made of a beaten (formed by hammering) shaft and seven lamps, three on opposing sides of the shaft and one atop the shaft. The light that proceeded from the lamps symbolized the testimony of the gospel, as a light in a dark place. The seven lamps therefore pictured the work of the Holy Spirit in the testimony of Christ (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 3:9. 4:10; Isaiah 11:2). The testimony of the gospel has been entrusted to the believer as the ministry of truth in earthen vessels. Thus, our Lord said to his disciples, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven.” It seems that the lampstand does fit the context after all, since our Lord connects the light with good works.

The maintenance of the lamps was the job of the *High Priest*. He alone trimmed the wicks and lit the lamps. He was responsible for the light. This teaches that though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, it

is Christ who maintains and keeps us. He alone trims the wicks and lights the fire (shaves the head, subdues nature). Without him we can do nothing. All glory for sustaining the light belongs to Him.

The shaft, upon which the lamps were held was beaten into its shape. This shaft pictured the sufferings of our Lord (“who learned obedience through the things he suffered”) in his saving work. It is his substitutionary work, the glory of his accomplishment, that supports the gospel that we preach (“all authority is given unto me...preach”).

Now look at our text in Numbers 8:2. Notice the second phrase, “When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.” Here we see the divine purpose of the lamps. They were designed to illuminate the lampstand *shaft*. All the light is for the glory of Christ. Christ, his person and his work, is the foundation of the Spirit's work. Everything hangs on this beaten stand. Everything the Spirit does through God's elect by the word is for the purpose of shining on Christ (John 15:26; 16:7-15). Every beam of light in the church, in the believer, flows from Christ and shines upon Christ. (Illustration - Acts 3:1-13.)

This is divine wisdom and glorious purpose in placing this passage where it is in scripture. The application is plain. Your works are to glorify Christ— “the seven lamps shall give light *over against* the candlestick.” Your nature subdued by the word so you may serve the Lord is that Christ alone may be glorified. “The seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick” (Illustration - Jn. 3:20-21).

Boasting then is excluded. If at a moment you seem to rise above nature and do that which is good, the great high priest has trimmed your wick and lit your light, and your work shall bring no recognition to you but “the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.”

Thank God for his word!

REMEMBERING REDEMPTION

Numbers 9:1-14

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,

2, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.

3, In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it.

4, And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover.

5, And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel.

6, And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day:

7, And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?

8, And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you.

9, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

10, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD.

11, The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

12, They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it.

13, But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbearth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.

14, And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land.

Here we have the Lord directing Moses to command the people to observe the Passover in the wilderness. There are three distinct positions that stand out in the story of the deliverance of Israel, three places where the people of God observed the Passover feast. The Passover was observed in Egypt (Exodus 12), here in the wilderness (Numbers 9) and in Canaan (Joshua 5). The significance is plain. The history of the elect from salvation to glory is the story of the remembrance of redemption.

How are the elect delivered from the bondage of Egypt? It is redemption by blood! How will the elect survive, be sustained and flourish in the wilderness of the world? They will do so upon the ground of redemption by blood. How will they tread upon the ruins of Jericho, take

out king after king and inherit the land flowing with milk and honey? They will do so upon the condition of redemption by blood. The blood of the lamb delivered the people from Egypt, went with them in sustaining power through the wilderness and planted their feet in Canaan. From ruin to glory it is redemption by the blood.

We know that the people of God in the wilderness picture the church in the world. We know that the Paschal Lamb of the Passover pictures Christ our "Passover slain for us." What is before us here is the guarantee that we are safe under the blood. Our destination is secure. The observation of the Passover is a reminder of that wonderful fact. Sin is put away by the blood; the wants, needs, trial and troubles of the world are no match for the blood; the glory that awaits the believer is secure because the blood has obtained it (Heb. 9:12).

This portion of scripture specifically has great import for us at this present time. As Israel in the wilderness pictures the church in the world, so the Passover feast commanded by the Lord represents the Lord's Table commanded by the Lord to his church.

In verses 1-5 we see that the people obeyed the Lord and observed the Passover, with all its attendant rites and ceremonies, on the fourteenth day of the *first* month. What follows is the report of a dilemma. This dilemma was not addressed in the institution of the Passover. It was not anticipated in all the exacting requirements given to Moses in Exodus 12. This is a view of the Passover in the *wilderness*. After the people had observed the feast, some of the people who did not observe the feast for reasons of uncleanness or because they were not in the area on the fourteenth of the first month came to Moses and Aaron with this new thing (vv.6-7). Moses' answer was, "I don't Know" and he sought the Lord for the answer. The dilemma is this; is a defiled person, one of God's elect, to be kept back from observing the Passover? The Lord answers Moses in verses 11-12.

That person who is defiled or is too far away to observe at the appointed time is to observe the Passover on the fourteenth of the *second* month.

It is important to note that though the Lord declares an exception as to time, he does not make any exception as to the observance of the Passover. The standards declared by God in Exodus 12 are to be kept *exactly*. In fact, those who are allowed to observe the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month are seemingly given a more minute description of their duties than those who were to observe it in the first month (compare vv. 3, 11-12). This teaches that no matter what the circumstance, no matter how weak and defiled the observer; the standards God has set are never lowered and never changed. The requirements of God in the matter of redemption are not negotiable. The fact that man can never be worthy, or of his own power ever attain to these requirements, does not alter, to any degree, the standard set by God. For one to stand in God's presence accepted, he must be without sin and possessed of a perfect righteousness.

It follows then that to observe the Passover, as well as the Lord's Table, one must observe them with the knowledge of sin forgiven and righteousness imputed. He must observe the table, not to gain, but in remembrance of what he has gained by the blood and righteousness of Christ. The issue is redemption accomplished by God. It is grace that allowed the defiled or those far away to observe a month later, but their observance was conditioned upon law and justice being satisfied by blood.

Now, the Passover as well as the Lord's Table set forth two foundational truths. They are redemption by blood and the unity of God's people. For the people to dwell in unity, all who are delivered by the blood must partake of the Passover, whether they observe it at the same time or not. Such provision is also made for the Lord's Table with the words "as often as ye do it." It is grace that allows the partaker of the table to observe it at a later date, but the command to partake is never changed nor

is the standard under which it is observed ever lowered; “We do show forth the Lord's death until he comes.”

There is something very interesting here. The defiled one is not said to have cleansed himself. The cleansing ceremony for touching the dead does not come in Numbers until chapter 19. So, the defiled one, though given leeway to observe a month later, observed the Passover as he was. The Passover as well as the Lord's table is not for those who make themselves worthy to observe it. It is truly, “come as you are.” It is not about you getting yourself right, or the church deciding if you are right. It is about remembering that you have been made right and qualified to partake because God has delivered you by the blood of Christ. Together, the strong and the weak, the well and the infirm, the frail and the hardy, the clean and the unclean come together in unity to remember that they were in the bondage of sin, but God has delivered.

Another thing is clearly declared in the text. Look at verse 13. The observance of the Passover as well as the Lord's Table is the command of God. It is not to be neglected for any reason. You have been given grace to partake it a month late or “as oft as ye do it,” but you have not been given grace to forego it. As to the Passover, the person who did not observe it was cut off from the people. Note well, our Lord distinguished this one as clean, in that he had not defiled himself with the dead. This may refer to the self-righteous one who sees no necessity of confessing sin. Both the Passover and the Lord's Table are a confession of sin. The fact is, however, that both the clean and the unclean are sinners (v13-last phrase). Both are to partake of the ceremony because it is not about my moral condition but about what God has done on my behalf. It is about redemption, remembering redemption, remembering redemption accomplished by blood and in no way conditioned on me. To refuse the table because you believe you are *unworthy* and to refuse the table because you believe you are *worthy* is to not understand the reason for it. It is to

make the blood and righteousness of Christ of no value. Let a man examine himself, on the basis of his discernment of the body and blood of Christ— “and so let him eat.”

Finally, if a stranger shall sojourn among you and desire to partake, no rule is established but this— “And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land” (v. 14).

Read again vv.1-14.

And then 1 Cor. 11:23-29;

23, For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24, And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25, After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26, For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27, Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28, But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29, For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.





FOLLOW THAT CLOUD

Numbers 9:15-23

15, And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.

16, So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

17, And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

18, At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

19, And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.

20, And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

21, And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

22, Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

23, At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

In the latter portion of Numbers chapter 9, we are returned to the life of the people of God in the wilderness. As we have seen thus far, this sojourn is typical of the church in the world. This passage is one of the sweetest and most informative in all of the word of God and is at the same time one of the most difficult to put into practice. Natural religion cares nothing for what it sees as idleness (Exo. 5:8-9). It thrives off busy-ness and always is about the business of giving everybody something to do. It disdains the concept of resting and waiting, looks at patience with impatience, and equates resting and waiting with indolence. That religion, the one that we are born with, has no time for what they see as lax-ness.

I can remember well a thing that folks used to say which revealed this thinking. If someone was not busy, appeared lazy, or was not expedient to begin an assigned task, often the assessment of such a person was “he must be waiting for the Spirit to move him.” This was a common motto of those who were religious as well as those who were not even nominally religious. Those who speak such things, and I have been and am one of them, do not think to realize that at the core of such thinking is a disdain for the principle of dependence upon and waiting on God.

The independent spirit of humanity is, at its heart, the notion of self-deity. We do not like to wait. We like to act. We have great difficulty, when things get tough, because we want to have an end to it. We struggle

with things because, somewhere down where we live, we believe that we can do something to change what is going on, or to somehow affect the outcome. The fact is that the outcome of everything belongs to God. When things get in the way of our idea of how they ought to be, throwing us into a hissy-fit, we must remember that these things are on schedule, planned to the most minute detail and will end exactly as they are supposed to and at the precise time (Isaiah 46:9-10). Nothing we do, or think we can do, will ever alter that—No! Not one iota. If we are honest; this immutable principle kind of grates on our last nerve.

Look however at this massive multitude of nomads in the vast and hard wilderness. Millions of people, God's people, having no concept of what is on the morrow, having no maps, no roads, a destination that is an unseen promise and perhaps worst of all, no plans, living by a very simple standard, summed up in verse 23. “At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.”

Lest anyone should become impatient and wonder if there was a limit to this assault on human independence, our Lord covers it all in verses 16-22. How long do we tarry? We wait till the cloud moves. Well, what if it doesn't move for a year? We wait till the cloud moves. What if we like where we are and don't want to leave? If the cloud moves in the morning, so do we. Well, how in the world can you have any roots, any stability in the world? You can't! When the cloud moves, we move.

Stability is not in the world; it is in the cloud. God is in the cloud and he never changes. He is stability personified, we are rooted and grounded in Him. Where he is there is sure foundation. Watch the cloud. All around things change and decay. Fortunes are made and lost. Strong men die and weak men live. Plans and hopes are just so much ether and vapor, but the cloud is always there (v.16)—always.

The Greek word for man (anthropos) has a root meaning “to turn the face upward.” Unlike the beasts, whose physiological design is to look downward, man is made to look upward. Augustine of Hippo said, “Man is made for God and will never be complete until he is united with God.” How do you live in this changing, dying, decaying and dangerous world? Do what you were designed to do, you old Homos-erectus; turn you face upward (Col 3:1-3)—look at the cloud. To those who sojourned in the wilderness, the prescription for life was simple. Look at the cloud. Follow the cloud. Rest when the cloud is not moving. Keep your bags packed for when the cloud does move, and do not expect the world and its religion to understand (Ex. 14:20).

I know this flies in the face of all that is holy to the notion we have of our own sovereign independence. I know this seems to be a kind of bondage from which we cannot escape. In truth, however, this is unmitigated freedom. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. The steps of the righteous are ordered by the Lord. There is freedom in that cloud, freedom from the constraints of the world and its labor-intensive, multi-tasking, “we’ll work till Jesus comes” business. There is freedom from the pressure of peers, the stress-abundant orientation of success at all costs, freedom from the notion that results depend on us controlling the outcome! The cloud—look to the cloud. Is it still? Then be still. Is it moving? Let’s go.

Some might say, “What’s wrong with you folks at Sequoyah? You don’t get involved in politics? You don’t have programs for the youth? You don’t go out into the neighborhood with the ‘simple plan of salvation?’ You aren’t soul-winners? You don’t have membership drives? You don’t join in religious campaigns? You don’t march against abortion and homosexuals? You don’t do nothing”! Yes, we do! We do *something*. We look at the cloud, and when it is not moving, we rest in our tents and

wait for the cloud to move (Ps. 37:3-7, Pro. 3:5; Isa. 40:31; Lam. 3:25-26; Isa. 32:17)! In the days of Elijah, God shut up the heavens for 3 ½ years. The people of Israel were dropping like flies. There were many widows in Israel. What is going on? Let's get to praying and doing; let's have a singing, raise some money, and by the way, where is the preacher? He is over in Sarepta, at a gentile widow's house and she's making him some biscuits! The-world-will-never-understand!

Now, there is no physical tabernacle today, nor is there a cloud hovering above the tent of testimony where the Ark of the Covenant resided. But we are still to govern our life by looking at the cloud, or better, what the cloud pictures. Remember that looking at the cloud was synonymous with waiting on the Lord, trusting him, being confident and at peace concerning what we are to do, where and when we are to go knowing that it is God who cares for us always.

What would give us such peace? What is the cloud? It is *Christ* and his *gospel* (Exodus 16:10, comp. with 2 Cor 4:6=glory; Job 36:26-28 & Deut. 32:2; Isa. 55:11=His doctrine; Prov. 16:15; Ps. 57:10). God's glory resides in Christ and is revealed in the gospel of his sovereign grace. That is the only thing that will cause you to rest and motivate you to serve. Why? Because the gospel gives peace that passes knowledge and understanding—peace with God and the peace of God—the knowledge that sins are put away and righteousness is imputed based upon God being just and satisfied concerning his holiness and righteousness. Look at the cloud! (See: Is. 44:22). Pitch your tent right here. Look to the cloud. Your sins are blotted out. All is forgiven; you are accepted, blessed and loved; wait, rest, relax. Watch the cloud; you will know what to do when it is time to do it.

One more thing. The world and its religion have its clouds, and they will try to get you to look to their clouds of duty, labor and a cacophony of activities designed to exalt human merit. All their clouds are low clouds.

Actually, they are just fog. Their clouds are inward. They want you to look at self (See: Proverbs 25:14; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude: 12). Don't look horizontally; don't look at self; look at Christ, his work accomplished for you. Watch the cloud that is God's glory and your good.

“At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed:”

THE TRUMPET

Numbers 10:2

2, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.

As we saw in the last chapter, the people of God in the wilderness were to be wholly dependent upon Jehovah for salvation and life. This was declared in the report of the cloud residing over the tent of testimony. The people were to wait on the Lord and were to move when the cloud moved and stay put when the cloud did not move. There were no exceptions to this rule. No matter how long the cloud remained or how long the duration of the movement, the people were to follow the cloud.

We saw that the cloud represented not only the salvation of the people but also the guide for their every movement and declaration of their complete rest. In short, the cloud represented the person and work of Christ as it is revealed in the gospel by the Holy Spirit.

We saw also that the labor-intensive religion of the world cannot and will not understand the divine principle of trusting the Lord for all things, not only salvation, but also motivation and rest—moving when it is time and resting when it is time. Of course, this is because the world, having not faith, cannot grasp the principle of faith.

The concept or doctrine of faith revealed in the word of God is well verified and well defined. It is then most blessed that the words we find in Numbers 10:1-10 should immediately follow the teaching of the cloud (read vv. 1-10).

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- 1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
 - 2, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.
 - 3, And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
 - 4, And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.
 - 5, When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward.
 - 6, When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys.
 - 7, But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm.
 - 8, And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.
 - 9, And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.
 - 10, Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.

The Lord directs Moses to make two trumpets of Silver of one-piece construction. Silver represents blood relative to blood as price of redemption, the one-piece construction representing the singularity of Christ. The trumpets would be blown by the priests for the purpose of calling the assembly to the door of the tabernacle and also calling the assembly when it was time to journey.

Who was to be called and for what purpose was in the designated number of trumpets being blown? If one trumpet was blown, the heads of the families were to be gathered. If an alarm was blown (using both trumpets), it designated the people were to move out or prepare for war. The call to gather and the alarm were designated by a difference in the pitch in which the trumpet was blown. It is important to note that a sound of alarm was never to be used when the assembly was called to gather for worship (v.7). The reason this is important is that the sound of alarm is a sound that designates that the people are to be active, ready for any eventuality, poised for whatever might be presented to them. The call to gather, to assemble at the door of the tabernacle, was a call to worship and did not involve alarm in any sense.

Worship began with gathering at the door of the tabernacle, where just inside was the brazen altar that pictured the finished work of Christ. Worship followed then to the laver where the defilement of the world was washed away; then to the lampstand that pictured Christ as the foundation and light of the world and the lamps picturing the people of God as lights shedding all their light on the lamp-stand (giving all glory to Christ); then to the table of show-bread picturing Christ pierced for his people, the bread of life, the food of the priesthood; then followed to the altar of incense picturing the intercessory work of Christ that was conditioned upon the finished work of Christ, in that the incense was laid on coals taken from the brazen altar; then to the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant declared Christ as the mercy-seat (propitiation), his blood

covering the broken law and fully satisfying God for the people. All this is about what God has done for his people in the substitutionary work of Christ. In this there is no cause for alarm, only cause for joy and praise (v. 10).

Religion issues a call to worship, but they do so with the sound of *alarm*. They call men and women to activity, to war, to move to and fro in the earth and call it worship. They cry “alarm, alarm” exciting the anger of the multitudes against the societal evils of abortion, perversion, government and all manner of presumed malady and call it worship. The trump of alarm is never to be used to call the people to worship—never!

One might ask that since the cloud and the trump basically did the same thing, namely, to tell the people when to rest and when to move, and both the trump and the cloud picture the finished work of Christ, what was the need of the trumpet? Here, again, we find the placement of a principle or truth, especially in the Old Testament, is very important. The revelation of the trump is preceded by the cloud. The cloud, the object, is there. It is visible or tangible, an immutable fact. Wherever the tribe is, wherever the tent of testimony is, there is the cloud. Whether in transit or in stasis the cloud is there; that fact does not change. This pictures the finished work of Christ. It is not *to be* accomplished. It *has been* accomplished. Christ has redeemed his people. He has blotted out their transgressions as a cloud. Whether men perceive it or believe it matters not. The cloud is there. It is fact, and it is truth.

Consider if you will, the various placement of the tents of this nomadic people. With upwards of two million denizens of the desert, the vastness of this encampment goes without saying. What if some people were placed at a considerable distance from the tent of the testimony? What if people were inside their tents or asleep when the cloud began to move, or when the time of worship rolled around? How would they know? How would they respond to what they could not see? Enter the trumpet!

What glorious wisdom belongs to our God! When they could not see, they could hear. How do they know about the cloud, the unchangeable truth of the cloud? They know it is time to worship, and they know it is time to journey, and they know it is time to war when they hear the sound of the trumpet. The trumpet is the preaching of the gospel; the response to the trumpet is faith. When response is made to the trumpet, then the cloud is seen and followed. When response is made to the trumpet, then it is time to worship, then is the cloud seen. We see by faith, born of the preached word and that gospel is the revelation of what Christ has done for us. Here in the Old Testament, during the time of the covenant of works, is the principle of faith clearly declared (Romans 10:13-17).

There are six words that I want us to consider in this context. They are six words that teach us much about the gospel. These six words are (1) Trumpet (2) Calling (3) Assembly (4) Ordinance (5) Memorial (6) Remembered.

1. The first word is *trumpet* (v.2). This instrument was used to make a loud sound. It was not for playing ditties. It was used only as a clarion to express a distinct and understandable message. The sound of this trumpet was a message, not a tune. The trumpet in scripture is equated with the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:52; 2 Thes. 4:16; Rev. 4:1). Note the response to this sound, this voice, is that those who are dead in Christ rise from the dead. This, of course, speaks of the end of time, but it also addresses what happens to those who were in Christ (died with him) on Calvary, when they hear the voice of Christ through the preaching of the gospel (John 5:25; Eph. 2:1, 4-6). The result of the trump was that the people followed the cloud (John 10:4-5; 27).

2. The second word is *calling* (v.2). The purpose of the trumpet was to call; "That thou mayest use them for the calling." The trumpet, blown by the priesthood, was a call. The root of this word "calling" is to proclaim. The calling of the gospel is the proclamation of the person and

work of Christ. Whether to worship or to journey, the trump was a proclamation. The gospel is the means by which God calls his elect. (Acts 2:39; Romans 8:29-30; 2 Thess. 2:13-14, Jude 1).

3. The third word is *assembly* (v.2). The trump is to be used to call the assembly. The Greek word for church (ecclesia) means “a called-out assembly.” The gospel, the trump of God, is made to call out the church of God. The trump, when it was sounded in the wilderness, was not intended for the surrounding nations, the infidels, the pagans; it was for the calling of the assembly. We preach the gospel to every creature, but we do so looking for the sheep, the elect, and the church of the living God. The word assembly can be best defined as a “gathered congregation” (V.7). Thus, the purpose of the trump is to call out and gather a congregation (Genesis 49:8-10; Psalm 40:9-10; Isaiah 11:10; Rev. 14:4-5).

4. The fourth word is *ordinance* (v.8). Generally speaking, most folk hold that there are two ordinances given to the church. One is baptism, in which the one being baptized confesses his union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. The other is the Lord's table, in which the partaker confesses that the work of Christ in his death and life are the singular cause of their acceptance before God. I believe there is a third ordinance given to the Church. It is the preaching of the gospel. It is the command of the Lord to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). It is an ordinance because there is no other means by which God will call his people—none at all (1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Peter 1:23-25). “And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance forever” (v. 8).

5. The fifth word is *memorial* (v.10). Just as the ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Table are memorials, so is the preaching of the gospel. The trumpets were for a memorial. When we preach the gospel, we are memorializing our God and the glorious work of salvation performed by the triune Godhead on behalf of the elect. Paul, when he wrote to the

Ephesians concerning what God had done, employed the word “blessed” in reference to God. That word in the original means to *eulogize* (read Eph. 1:3:14). The gospel is a memorial of what God has done (1 Sam. 12:24; 2 Chron. 16:12; Ps. 98:1, 105:5, 66:16; Mark 5:18-19).

6. The sixth and final word is *remembered* (v. 9). This word is in reference to *God* remembering. Whenever you see this word in reference to God, it teaches that God remembers his covenant (Gen. 8:1; Rev 4:3; 10:1)). God is a covenant God. He has never done anything without a covenant. The blowing of the trumpet, the preaching of the gospel, causes God to remember his covenant and save his people from their enemies because the preaching of the gospel is the declaration of the covenant of Grace. It behooves us, then, to preach the gospel, to blow the trumpet in a clear and plain manner, that we may not be misunderstood. (See: 1 Cor. 14:7-9).

“Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.”



ON THE MOVE

Numbers 10:11-31

11, And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony.

12, And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.

13, And they first took their journey according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

14, In the first place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah according to their armies: and over his host was Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

15, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethaneel the son of Zuar.

16, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Zebulun was Eliab the son of Helon.

17, And the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle.

18, And the standard of the camp of Reuben set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elizur the son of Shedeur.

19, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Simeon was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

20, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Gad was Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

21, And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came.

22, And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elishama the son of Ammihud.

23, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.

24, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideoni.

25, And the standard of the camp of the children of Dan set forward, which was the rereward of all the camps throughout their hosts: and over his host was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.

26, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Asher was Pagiel the son of Ocran.

27, And over the host of the tribe of the children of Naphtali was Ahira the son of Enan.

28, Thus were the journeyings of the children of Israel according to their armies, when they set forward.

29, And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel.

30, And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.

31, And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.

32, And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.

33, And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

34, And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp.

35, And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.

36, And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.

We have come to the place and time when the camp in the wilderness is to move. All things are ready. Before the first step is made, God has covered every base. Every man is in his place according to his pedigree, and every tribe is ready to march under its assigned banner. All are atoned for and numbered among the people. The Levites are at their posts, their assignments in hand. Full provisions have been made for cleansing the camp from defilement. The furniture of the tabernacle is wrapped and ready to go. The cloud and the fiery pillar are in the place. They lack nothing; they are complete, having all things supplied by their all-sufficient God. Grace has brought them safe thus far and grace will bring them home. The omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God has provided for every possible contingency. They are thoroughly furnished unto all goods works. What a picture of the work of grace in salvation.

Religion writes books on “how to get started” or “how to take the first steps” presuming the journey begins with man. This is not the case. In

Christ, God's elect are *complete*. Everything they need for their sojourn they already possess. (In purpose they are already in Glory). They are not told by God to strike out, get busy or hit the road. They, fully equipped, still *wait* for the command of the Lord. They wait for the trump to sound and the cloud to move. They are and ever shall be "followers." The ark will go before them and they will follow (Ex. 23:23; Isa. 45:2, 52:12). Know this, when the Lord moves you, you will lack nothing for the trip; "my grace is sufficient for thee."

Their journey was to *Paran*. This word means the place of caverns, but the root from which this word originates means glory. This is the direction and destination of the church at all times, camping in glory and headed for glory. The fact that the root word for "cavern" is "glory" alludes to the depths of mercy of Almighty God (Romans 11:33).

If we could stop here and just consider the wonder of this truth; that wherever we go there is glory; wherever we camp there is glory and the end of our trek will be glory. When we camp our Lord is in the midst of us. When we move, our Lord, our forerunner, goes before us. Why should such a blessed and well-equipped people ever falter or ever murmur? Why should a people who are complete want for anything other than what they so abundantly possess? Alas, these blessed, complete, provided-for, elect multitudes are yet sinners. From the least to the greatest, all are so prone to lean on the arm of the flesh, and to trust the seen rather than the invisible God. "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Could it be that these, to whom all things are given, should in a moment forget their great benefactor? Sadly, the answer is "yes."

Who is the perpetrator? It is none other than Moses (1 Cor. 8:2; 10:12). Will Adam, the crown of creation, rebel against his Maker? Will Noah become besotted after being sustained in the flood? Will Abraham, the father of the faithful, lie to Abimelech and almost lose his wife? Will Samson lose everything for the love of a woman? Will David despise his

throne and become an adulterer, conspire to murder and flippantly justify his actions? Will Simon Peter deny the Lord? Will he later despise the grace of God by aligning himself with the legalists of that day in Antioch? Will Paul observe Jewish ceremony after preaching salvation by grace? Will a preacher of God's grace falter and give in to the practices of false religion? Will a believer give up the gospel for the sake of peace? The answer is yes, yes and still yes. Why? Because they all, we all, are sinners. What will a believer do? He will do anything an unbeliever will do if God allows! God alone keeps us from falling—not our strength.

So here Moses, the very one who spoke with God face to face as one speaks to friend, Moses the chosen one, chosen to deliver Israel from the cruel slavery of Egypt, is first to falter. In verse 29 Moses beseeches his father-in-law, Hobab, to go with them on the journey to the promised land. Were it not for the honesty of the word of God we might never see the motive that is inside Moses' heart. There is nothing wrong with Moses desiring to have Hobab on the journey. The promise that Moses makes to his father-in-law is even true. "Come thou with us, and we will do the good" was real. If Hobab agreed to go, he would partake in every blessing of Israel. Just by proximity to God's people, the world receives the same temporal goods, as do the people of God. The fact is that the world still goes on because the elect of God are in it.

However, we see in verse 31 the motive of Moses for this kind invitation to Hobab. It is evident that Moses was not so interested in what could be done for Hobab as he was in what Hobab could do for Israel. Through the years, I've seen many in churches gravitate to a new person because he is of renown, or wealthy, offering praise and welcome because such a person would surely be an asset to the church. The church doesn't need you; you need the church. Whether you are rich or poor, known or anonymous, you need the church, because the church has the gospel. God is in the midst of the church. He will add to it such as should be saved, and

though the ones he adds may not have two nickels to rub together or money to burn, they are added to the church for *their* benefit, not the church's. I know the world's religion thinks otherwise. Perhaps you have all seen the sign in the churchyard or billboard. "You can't spell church without 'U.'" Well, you can't spell stupid, useless, unnecessary, unclean, unholy, ungodly, sluggard and dullard without "U" either.

What did Moses need with Hobab's eyes? Was there a snake behind a rock that only Hobab could see? Did not Moses serve the all-seeing God? Did he lack anything? Was not the sovereign of the universe, the all-sufficient controller of all things the God of Moses? How do you reckon that snake got behind that rock? Oh my, Moses and me! How hard we find it to lean on the unseen arm! How appealing is the arm of the flesh! How ready we are to depend on the visible rather than the invisible! We can see Hobab, but we can't see God. How poor is faith when we lean on a fellow worm rather than falling on God. How many of us shudder inside when we think of our life being led by that which we cannot see? The fact is that we cannot know where he immediately takes us, thus fear of the unknown troubles our soul. We may as well admit it, we want to see something—anything rather than to be cast upon trusting God.

We are prone to lean on the arm of the flesh. Yet we know by experience that every time we have, the results have been disastrous. We know also by revelation that those who leaned on their own understanding did not fare well. On the flip side of that, we also can account the blessed results when we leaned on God. How abundantly he blessed us above what we could think or ask! How he opened the windows of heaven and poured down mercies on our aching heads! He has never disappointed us! There has never been a case where he has not been there for us, our shield against the fiery darts of Hell, our friend that sticks closer than a brother, our sovereign who works all things for our good. Yet still, we are ever

ready to invite Hobab along, ready to distrust God and trust our eyes, ready to lean on the broken reed and take up our water in a broken cistern.

Thank God for his grace. While our eyes are on Hobab, trusting his eyes to watch the way, the God of all glory condescends in his marvelous grace, bypasses Moses and Hobab and takes the lead. Our failure does not thwart his purpose. There is a land flowing with milk and honey to be reached, a land that is fairer than day to be possessed, and his superior faithfulness to us overrides our inferior faith in him.

Look at verse 33. There you have it. Ten thousand Hobabs cannot lead Moses and the people of God to a resting place, but the ark, Christ, will bring his people to rest (Matt. 11:28). And the cloud was with them by day, reminding them that their sins had been blotted out (Deut. 32:9-14).

The text seems to show Moses, while talking to Hobab, seeing the ark moving out of the corner of his eye—God leading. When Christ is seen by faith, we cease our momentary courting of the flesh (v.36). Where is Christ to be seen? In his word, and in his church (Revelation 1:10-13). Do you worry about where he will lead, because you do not know and are afraid you'll go astray? Think for a moment and you will realize that you *do* know. You are out there every day, suffering the hatred of the world, the vipers of religion hissing at you, the dumb dogs of religion nipping at your heels, and where do you end up? Where does God lead you to find rest and peace? He leads you to the resting place. He leads you to Christ and his Church. Then, in your heart, you say, “Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.”

Fear not. You do know where he will lead you.

AND THE PEOPLE WERE COMPLAINERS

Numbers 11:1-6

1, And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

2, And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.

3, And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

4, And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5, We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6, But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

The first phrase of the first verse of Chapter 11 might well be the description of the rest of the entire record concerning the people of God in the wilderness. A better rendering of the phrase is “and the people were complainers.” There is no doubt, much to our shame, that this is also the record of the sojourn of the church in the world. We are reminded again of the words of 1 Corinthians 10:10-12.

10, Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

11, Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12, Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Here is a people, chosen by God, delivered from cruel bondage by the blood of the Lamb, completely equipped for every eventuality, given a pedigree (children of God), given a banner under which to march (Christ the ensign), given a cloud for protection and to follow (the substitutionary work of Christ), given a fire by night (the light of the gospel in a dark world and a reminder that it is the justice of God brought against the substitute that declared them not guilty), the Lord himself their leader and gatherer on their march to a city whose builder and maker is God.

They are accepted, having full privileges and rights of the firstborn. They are complete and have need of nothing. They are a people blessed, sought out, bought, beloved and protected. If something goes wrong, there must be a “but” to explain it. Alas, there is not! The first word of the 11th chapter is “And,” suggesting that the course that follows is as true of this people as the glory that they already possess. Should this not read that the people were content? Should this not reveal that the people, so blessed, had a song in their heart and praise upon their lips? No, the first description of this people, the moment their feet take the first step in the wilderness journey, is “and the people were complainers.”

Is this the course of those redeemed by blood and saved by grace? Read Romans 7:15-25. Our first step and every subsequent step is sin. When we are static, at rest, living in the blessed estate that God has put us in, as with this group, there is no record of complaint. But let us begin to

move, and in motility our soul languishes because of the hardships of this world. Are the hardships more than we can bear? Of course not! They are common to every man! Has God not provided a way of escape? Absolutely! This text speaks to the nature, the old man that strives within us and always aims his missiles at the source of our completeness. This must be the case for what else do we actually possess than the fact that we are fully and completely saved. “And the people were complainers.”

The clarity of scripture is amazing. We would desire this sentence to begin with a “but,” suggesting that such wicked behavior was some kind of anomaly. No, this sentence begins with “and” suggesting a state of existence, a normal course of behavior. “And the people were complainers.” We need not ponder this; we need not pursue some useless defense. This is the shameful medallion that hangs around our stiff necks. We have it all, and we are complainers. Here it is naked, bare, embarrassing and blush worthy. There is no deeper life here, no higher plains of glory, no progressive sanctification, just a sad matter of fact “and the people were complainers.”

We will look at God's response to the complainers at the end of this lesson, but first we'll look at the complaint itself and see why it engendered the response that it did.

In verses 4-6 we see the true point of every complaint. This must be seen, lest we somehow diminish the crime and do not see it for what it is. Look at verse 6. These are the words of a people who have need of nothing, who have every need supplied by their good, gracious and benevolent heavenly Father. “But now our soul is dried away.” This complaint differs somewhat from the error of Moses in our study last chapter. There Moses erred from a place of perceived or imagined need. He felt that he needed the eyes of Hobab, because Hobab was familiar with the surrounding area. For a time, he forgot the eyes of him who made the wilderness, revealing he felt that God, perhaps, had not met every

need. Here, the complaint is different. The people do not complain of need but rather of *want*.

The word “soul” here (*nephesh*) has to do with the inner man as it relates to the seat of desires, fleshly wants. It is not a denial of provision but the declaration of wanting something other than what is possessed. There is no pretense of need but rather a blatant petition for something *more*. It is a declaration of dissatisfaction, of malcontent—the true meaning of murmuring. The proof of this fact is seen in the next phrase “there is nothing at all—beside.” Whatever they have, though completely sufficient in reality, is not enough. They want something else, something more.

What is that something that is to this people, not enough? The last phrase is a telling one. “There is nothing at all beside this manna, before our eyes.” Manna is a type of Christ. It is alone the provision of God as Christ alone is what God has for his people. The people were not discounting Christ; they were desirous of something other than Christ. They were not saying that Christ was not ample food. They were saying that they wanted more.

This then is an issue of the gospel. Every complaint registered by the believer is ultimately this complaint. Whether overtly stated or covertly insinuated, every complaint is simply this, “I want something more than what God has provided; I want something more than Christ; I want something else to go along with what I have.” However unpleasant this is to admit, it is nonetheless true, and if any of us could be given grace to pare down our embellishments to where the proverbial rubber hits the road, we would find that the source of our malady is that we desire something more than Christ. This is not the infidel, the lost man, the enemy of God speaking. This is not spoken by those who have no standing with God. This is not the revelation of a lost condition. These are folks who are accepted in the beloved, these are God's people, “and the people

were complainers.” I’m reminded of a Bob Dylan song in which one of the lyrics is about a harlot standing in a doorway with out-stretched hand crying “more—more” (Prov. 30:15-16). Mark it down; Christ will never satisfy the flesh!

Where do these complaints originate? What is their source? The answer to these questions is found in verse 4. “The *mixed* multitude” is the source. This specifically refers to the Egyptians that came out of Egypt with the children of Israel (Ex. 12:38). Spiritually, this refers to the old man that resides in us, the flesh that beguiles us and reminds us of so-called “better things.” Like the demon possessed man of Gadara, a legion of devils resides in us. Ole’ Legion reminds us of things that feel good, and of things that work in the world. We have Christ and Christ is all. Truly, we have nothing beside. Oh, but the *mixed* multitude goes a lusting. We preach Christ and him crucified and the mixed multitude says “there must be more to preach.” We preach “’tis done; the great transaction’s done,” and the mixed multitude says, “surely there is something for us to do.” We say that we meet to hear the gospel and worship God. The mixed multitude says, “shouldn’t we have programs for our youth.”

The mixed multitude is also the doctrines that accompanied our birth, self-righteousness, self-deification, self-aggrandizement and self-will. How difficult it is for these things to be subdued. They are “certain men of old ordained to condemnation,” “tares among the wheat,” “false brethren unawares brought in” who “spy out our liberty” and who are “spots on our feasts.” These mixed multitudes came with us from Egypt, symbolic false religion of works and will. They came with us from the place where the chains of bondage dragged us down to the grave. They came with us from the land of despair and yet they do not cause us to recall the bondage, but rather the tastes, smells and feelings of satisfied flesh. The tempter coats his lies with honey and makes bondage taste like freedom.

How secure we are in Christ! How complete we are in Him! How utterly sure is our destiny! How perfectly supplied and fed we are with manna from God! But now we must move. We must step into the world. We must stand against a seemingly innumerable company of enemies and the stress of trying to please men, the wagging tongues of hell's hags, the burden of the “cares of this world” and we have nothing beside this man. Suddenly, compromise seems reasonable, and “giving in” has a pleasant taste, and those around us seem to have it made and “the people complain.” Give us flesh or we die. We love Christ! We are thankful for Christ, *but* God have mercy on our souls, we want more!

Look at verse 1. God heard and was angered and sent fire. He sent fire from the outside inward. Like the army and Marines that surrounded Baghdad, soon it will consume all. Why? Because God gave manna to prove whether his people would walk in his statutes (Deut. 8:2-5). The people, by their complaints were saying that Christ was not enough, that God's provision was unfulfilling, and God will not have the value, worth and honor of his Son diminished to any degree. Fire ensues!

Under the Old Covenant it was fire of destruction, flames of consuming wrath. But, thank God, under the New Covenant it is a conflagration of chastisement, fiery trials that consume the dross and refine the gold (1 Peter 1:1-9). These trials do burn with intense heat; “Now no chastising for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous,” but they are blast furnaces of benevolence. “Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby,” and all are designed to cause us to appeal to our intercessor (v.2). One man said, “The life of the believer is the happiest and miserabilist of all things.” Christ will never satisfy the flesh. Christ will never change the flesh. Oh, that he may *subdue* the flesh because as long as we are here on the earth we can be assured of this one thing about us— “the people were complainers.”





NOT BY POWER

Numbers 11:10-29

10, Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

11, And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

12, Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

13, Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

14, I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

15, And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

16, And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

17, And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

18, And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.

19, Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days;

20, But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?

21, And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month.

22, Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

23, And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

24, And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

25, And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

26, But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

27, And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

28, And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29, And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

There is an old saying that goes something like this; “Be careful what you ask God for, he just may give it to you.” Both the people of God and their leader, Moses, reveal this old saying to be so. As we saw in the last chapter, the people were not satisfied with God's provision. In type, the people were not satisfied with Christ and desired flesh to eat along with the manna. In the last part of this chapter, God gives them their desire and the results are less that wonderful (vv.31-33; Psalm 106; 14-15). In our text, Moses asks for help and relief of the burden of the people, which he wrongly presumed to be his own. The results of God giving him his request proved less than favorable. This portion of scripture is about the ministry of the gospel, the care, feeding and forbearing of the people of God.

Before we come down too hard on Moses, remember that God's record of him is that he was the meekest of all men, and he was faithful in all his house. We know, as evidenced by his return from glory with Elijah to speak with Christ on the mount of transfiguration, he resides in glory with the spirits of just men made perfect. Nevertheless, the inspired canon gives us this account and does so for a purpose (Rom 15:4). The Holy Spirit pulls no punches in revealing the frailty of all of God's elect. The best of men are just men at their best, and men at their best are full of darkness, weakness, and egocentrism. All these things are brought to fruition in the wilderness of this world. Moses was a man that was subject to like passions that plague all of God's people.

The truth that men see, when confronted with overwhelming troubles, is a matter of perception based on circumstance. Though the sustenance and maintenance of God's people were never the burden of Moses, it was he who heard the woeful wails of the malcontents. It was Moses who heard the murmurings. The people blamed *him*, and he presumed that he was the one who had to carry the weight. He had responsibilities that God had given him, but his responsibilities did not include the supply of the people. All he had to do to realize this was to look at the ground every morning. Such a thing was indeed too heavy for his shoulders, but his shoulders were not designed or meant to carry it. However, God's shoulders were plenty broad enough. He who was with Moses was sufficient to the task. Sometimes, in the midst of the fray, it is hard to see the unseen. Paul made some real mistakes, but in a moment of Holy Spirit given lucidity, as he considered the power of the gospel to both save and destroy, he said, "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

Again, Moses' desire was for help to carry out what he perceived to be his burden. Moses asks God to take his life if he had to do this alone. He was not alone in requesting such a thing. Look at 1 Kings 19:1-4.

1, And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

2, Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

3, And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

4, But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

But blessed be the Lord. His saving grace is in no way conditioned on our weakness or our strength. God's grace is eternal, effectual and unconditional. These two prophets, sinners saved by grace, who in a moment of weakness asked God for death are the same two who, on the mount, “spake with Christ about the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” God's thoughts are not our thoughts. They found out where sufficiency was.

Moses made a common error, believing that the impossible is somehow made possible with the addition of more incapable bodies. People believe there is power in numbers. Moses had been chosen to lead the people with the promise of God's presence. Moses asked for the help of Aaron and that proved to be a problem for the rest of the trip. He now asks for help and God gives it to him (vv.16-17).

Was the addition of these 70 men an increase in power? No, because they received the spirit that was upon Moses. They were not seventy times the spirit but rather the spirit divided by seventy. The multiplication of men was not the multiplication of spiritual power. It probably made Moses feel better, but it lost him his dignity. He was no longer the man assigned to the task but rather a part of the team, and the result was the displeasure of God (vv. 18-20). Moses response showed that he still did not understand that God would do the supplying (v.21-22). God had to remind him again (v.23).

Our unbelief causes us to believe that God is limited. Faith brings God into the picture; unbelief looks to self. Our help is of God. We are reminded again that our frailty is evidenced by our inclination to believe our troubles are fixable by circling our wagons and feeling that *we* must solve our problems. The end result is always the same, we dig ourselves deeper and deeper until we cry for mercy, and our gracious God shows us where the true power has always been. God is our help. God is our defense.

This is especially relevant to the ministry of the gospel. The gospel preacher is assigned to a task for which he is not sufficient, and that task is singular—to preach the word. Sometimes, he forgets that the power of that ministry is the Holy Spirit. He applies to his own intellect, counts on his diligence in study, relies on his own energy, and even sometimes believes that the results somehow have to do with his own efforts. He sometimes feels that he has said all he can, and the people grow weary of hearing his voice because he certainly does. He forgets that God has said, “Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” If a man draws on his own resources, he will soon run dry. It is the Spirit alone who takes the things of Christ and reveals it unto men. The task given to a preacher is singular and he is to give himself to it (1 Tim. 4:15). The results belong to God (1 Cor. 2:4-5; 3:5-7).

There are other lessons to learn from this text as well

1. First, though the gospel is given to one man, he is not the only man. Look at verses 24-25. The seventy that God added to Moses were all made prophets by God. God has not left himself without a witness. He has his way in all things. If the preacher falters, fails and even believes that he bears the burden alone, there are others whom God will use. Whether one preaches, or seventy, it is the spirit of God who makes the word effectual.

2. Secondly, the preacher must be careful not to believe his own press reports. It is a fact of life that some folks on occasion, folks who are members of a congregation pump up the preacher. They talk, sometimes as if their preacher is the only one who has the gospel and are jealous if some other preacher gets some praise. This is a natural thing. Everybody wants to believe that theirs is the best, no matter what they have. The problem arises when the people begin to convince the *preacher* that he is the only one who has something to say and are willing to exclude others who also preach the gospel. The preacher must be careful, lest he begin to believe what those who love him say about him. A wise preacher told me when I entered the pastorate “Be everybody's friend and be nobody's best friend. Be close to everyone and be too close to no one, because the fine line between pastor and flock is crossed with great peril.”

Look at verses 26-28. Eldad and Medad's names mean respectively “God has loved” and “love.” They did not gather with the rest at the tabernacle, though they were part of the seventy. They remained in the camp and preached. For whatever reason they did so, the servants who loved Moses didn't much like it. These didn't seem to be part of the recognized group, and the servants of Moses said, “Tell them to shut up.”

3. Thirdly the preacher must not allow his flock to overrate him and must judge a righteous judgment based wholly on the message, even though some preacher might not seem to be part of the recognized group (Luke 9:49-50). Moses was saying, “Don't think that I'm special.”

Personally, I wish that all the Lord's people were preachers. If a man is preaching the gospel, I pray for grace to hold him up, and I hope he does the same for me because neither he nor I am sufficient for the task. The ministry of the gospel is dependent upon the Spirit of God. The important thing is that the gospel is preached, whether it is Moses or 70 others who preach it.

If the Lord has given you a function, and he has to all his children, pursue it with vigor but not in your own strength (Prov.3:5-6)

BECAUSE OF THE ETHIOPIAN WOMAN

Numbers 12:1-16

1, And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

2, And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.

3, (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

4, And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5, And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

6, And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

7, My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

8, With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9, And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.

10, And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

11, And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

12, Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

13, And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

14, And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.

15, And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

16, And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.

This chapter is another of those that seems *not* to have a great amount of connection to what precedes it or what comes after. It is about a dispute that Aaron and Miriam have with Moses. Moses does not seem to be a part of the dispute, but rather the target of it. Verse 3 certainly implies that Moses was not too much concerned with these two, nor whatever their petty argument might be. In fact, in all of this we do not see Moses speaking anything against Aaron and Miriam or defending himself in any way. The Lord comes to the defense of Moses and acts in wrath against Miriam, as she was probably the instigator of the whole thing, and whose very name means “rebellion.” She was the elder sister of Moses and Aaron.

There are several ideas about what the dispute was. Most commentators and Jewish writers lean toward the idea that Miriam was upset, and stirred up Aaron, because Moses had acted alone in choosing the 70 elders that would rule with him (11:16-17). Whatever it was, it is certainly implied that Miriam and Aaron wanted part in something that Moses had done, or was doing, and believed that they were entitled to be part of it (v. 2).

The reference to the meekness of Moses in verse three is to give us something about the error committed in verse 2. First, being a meek man, there was no cause to speak against him; he had done them no harm. Secondly, being the meekest of men, there was no possibility that Moses was guilty of holding anything over the heads of Miriam and Aaron. Their declaration that they, too, were prophets (as if they had been left out) would only hold water if Moses had somehow made them feel inferior. This could not have been the case because God inspired it to be written that Moses was the meekest of men.

Whatever the dispute was, it was solely on the shoulders of Miriam and Aaron and a matter of their own perception. Some writers suggest that Miriam felt that the Ethiopian wife of Moses was having too much influence over Moses and actually feared for the people of God. However, I think that scenario might be stretching the imagination a bit. I do think it safe to say, from what they said, they wanted to have some part in what Moses did. Being prophets, they felt that God would speak to them just as he spoke to Moses, and therefore, their place in the economy of the wilderness journey was equal with that of Moses.

It is important to note, that God does not address the dispute in his reaction to them, but he addresses their presumption of equality with Moses. This clearly sets forth the truth of where God has invested himself and his Glory. Moses here is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 7; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Hebrews 3:5-6). Religion always will have its jealous

zealots who speak as if their words were equal with God's. They will claim words from God, and have people, silly, foolish people in advantage, putting themselves even above the Son of God as the final revelation of God. They, like Miriam, rebellious in heart, claim to be prophets too, like Christ, and therefore worthy to share in the honor of salvation, exalting their will, their choice and their decision (2 Thess. 2:3-4). Though God has said, "This is my Son. hear ye *Him*," they say *we* have a right to be heard too.

God makes it clear, painfully clear, that though he speaks to his prophets in dreams and visions, he speaks to Moses, *face to face*, revealing to him even his similitude, or his hinder parts, or what he has done (vv. 6-8; Ex. 33:19-21). The Lord is saying to these two erring ones, that Moses indeed is he who speaks for God. Likewise, to any who would assume that somehow the glory of what God has done will be shared with anyone but Christ alone, God says, "This is my Son"—I speak to him face to face (1 Cor. 3:3-7).

What was the dispute that Miriam had with Moses? The first verse states it pretty clearly. It is not about the seventy elders; it is about Moses' choice of a bride. Miriam's problem was that Moses had chosen a bride about whom she was not consulted and with whom she is evidently uncomfortable. Now the fact that she was an Ethiopian, a Cushite and therefore black, might suggest a hint of racism in Miriam's issue with Moses. However, I don't think the race card was being played here. The wife of Moses was not a daughter of Abraham. She was a *Gentile* and therefore a *dog*, un-chosen, unwashed and unclean.

By the manner in which Miriam spoke, it is evident that she felt that she should have had some input in the matter, and by such a suggestion, there is intimation that she might have made a better choice. In this she represents the notion that salvation is for good folk, not dogs, not the vile, but rather the meritorious. Christ way-laid such notions everywhere he

went (Matthew 9:10-13; 15; 21-28; Luke 15:1-7; 18:9-14). Religion will never approve of Christ choosing who we would save, and further, religion will never approve of who he has chosen to save (1 Cor. 1:26-31). If election were left to us, our enemies would never be saved. Is there someone who you can hardly stand, that rubs you the wrong way, that grates on your last nerve, that you don't even want to be in the same room with? Well, what if their salvation depended on your input into their election?

Miriam learned that such thinking brought about a dire consequence. She was made leprous. It is interesting to note that she was not called a leper but rather that she was *afflicted* with leprosy. The reason for this is that Miriam was a child of God. She was a prophetess (Ex. 15:20). Here, leprosy is not seen in the sense of a state of being but in the sense of chastisement.

Note how the leprosy is described. In verse 10, it is as “white as snow.” She was covered with leprosy, in a full-blown state of the disease. There was no question of her affliction, but likewise, there can be no question of God's mercy upon her (Lev. 13:13, 17, Isaiah 1:18). She had erred; she was God's child; she had been presumptuous, but she was at the place where she would be pronounced clean. All she needs is for the great high priest to intercede for her and declare her so (vv. 11-13).



SPIES

Numbers 13:1-33

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

3, And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel.

4, And these were their names: of the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur.

5, Of the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori.

6, Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

7, Of the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph.

8, Of the tribe of Ephraim, Oshea the son of Nun.

9, Of the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu.

10, Of the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi.

11, Of the tribe of Joseph, namely, of the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi.

12, Of the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli.

13, Of the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael.

14, Of the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi.

15, Of the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.

16, These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.

17, And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:

18, And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;

19, And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;

20, And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.

21, So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath.

22, And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)

23, And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.

24, The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence.

25, And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

26, And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

27, And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

28, Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

29, The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

30, And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

31, But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

32, And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.

33, And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

This chapter is the account of the Lord directing Moses to choose 12 men, honorable men, well-respected rulers among the tribes, to go out and assess the land of promise. Though Moses said the Lord had commanded this to take place, the Lord is said to have spoken to him. It is reasonable for Moses to speak in this manner because, if the Lord has spoken, it is the Word of his mouth, and his word rarely comes in any other form than a

command (vv. 1-3). However, Jewish scholars suggest that it is not a command, but rather a suggestion to Moses, if Moses was inclined to do it.

As the nation approached the promised land, perhaps the people were expressing some kind of trepidation about what lay before them, and maybe it was even affecting Moses. Whatever the reason, the Lord spoke to Moses about it, and Moses readily agreed and set about to make it happen. Often the reason the Lord does a thing is to *prove his people*. That is why the Lord sent the manna (Deut. 8: 2-3). We know well that the Manna did, indeed, prove the people as to whether they would be satisfied with the Lord's provision (Numbers 21: 4-5). Sending out these 12 to spy out the Land of Promise, without question, proved the people (Num. 14:1-2).

Moses chose the 12, and only two among them above 20 years of age that were delivered from Egypt, entered the promised land. Those two were Caleb and Oshea. In verse 16, Moses renamed Oshea. He called him Jehoshua. He was the son of Nun whom we know as Joshua. With adding the "Je" to Oshea, which means "salvation," it has been suggested that Moses named him "Jehovah is salvation".

The twelve clandestinely entered the promise land and returned with their respective reports. The promise which the Lord had made of it being a land of milk, honey and full of abundance was proven by a cluster of grapes brought back which required two men to carry (v. 23). The report of all twelve was consistent concerning the substance in the land. However, ten of the men gave an ill report of the inhabitants and walled cities in the land.

Their report was gloomy and fearful, and the final blow was delivered when they spoke of the sons of Anak. They were giants and fierce. These ten spies, in effect, engendered fear and doubt in the hearts of the people. This is seen in their reaction in chapter 14. Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to rise up and take the land which the Lord had promised (v.

30; 14:7-9). The sad report is, the people believed the ten cowards and not the two speakers of truth. The result was that *everyone* above the age of twenty when they were delivered out of Egypt paid for their unbelief and were disallowed entrance into the land.

As I rehearsed this in my mind, I thought of our Lord and the intractability of unbelief when it comes to hearing the truth. A dear old preacher friend of mine used to say, “You cannot believe because you will not believe, and you will not believe because you cannot believe.” Our Lord said it best as he spoke to very religious men in John chapter 8. He looked in the eyes of men who were steeped in religion, who believed that they were truly God’s people and told them in verses 43, 45 and 47, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

The twelve spies were sent to spy out the land to reveal unbelief and belief. So it is when the gospel is preached (2 Corinthians 2: 14-17). When the Gospel is preached, when the Manna appears on the ground, when the water gushes forth from the Rock, men and women are proved.



UNBELIEF

Numbers 14:1-10

1, And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2, And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3, And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4, And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

5, Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

6, And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7, And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8, If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9, Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

10, But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

This passage of scripture describes the fact and results of unbelief. The book of Hebrews, in reference to this event, reveals what this whole passage is about (Hebrews 3:17-19). It is the continuation of what took place in our last study when the people believed the reports of the men who told them of the giants and all the scary things in the land.

The first thing to note is that unbelievers are believers, but they don't believe the truth. They prefer the lie because it plays into their natural superstition, independence and the emotional necessities of their religion. To see the clear representation of this truth we have only to look at two examples of unbelief. Both are in reference to Egypt.

The first is Exodus 32:4.

“And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

That unbelief is willful is without doubt. What these people said in this passage requires the suspension of all true belief, and the suspension of all rationality. This is the superstition of unbelief. Even that which is totally irrational will be embraced if that is what the unbeliever wants to believe.

The second passage is in our text in verse 4. “And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” This is the willful independence of unbelief. If a calf can bring us out, a captain can bring us back. All this is born of unbelief manifested in the fears and terrors of what they *see* and refusing to believe God who they cannot see.

The subject being addressed is the gospel which is a description of what God has secured for his people in the person and work of his son. It is done, the great transaction of salvation, and all that is entailed in that blessed thing is referred to as the *rest*. What was the rest? It was the promised land with all its milk, honey and exceeding riches secured by God for his people. It is the salvation of the elect and all its attendant glory wrought by Christ, accomplished, done and perfected. Belief possesses what God has given; unbelief looks elsewhere. (Hebrews 3:17-19, 4:11; Isaiah 28:9-15).

There is something remarkable about unbelief. It is manifest in the face of unquestioned evidence. The gospel is a clear representation of what God has *done*. It is a glorious report of accomplished salvation and it is free. All costs have been met, every aspect is covered, and it is free! It will cost you nothing because Christ has already paid it all. Why would anyone not want to enter into this rest? There is only one possibility—unbelief. God is not believed.

How is unbelief manifested and here described?

1. Unbelief is manifest in emotion, born of unreasonable and irrational fears (v.1). This is not to say that believers do not show emotion; they sometimes even weep. But their emotion is based on their belief of the truth. Unbeliever's emotion is based on rejection of the truth. In reality, they cut off the light and cry because it is dark. They spend their lives looking, seeking through a veil of tears for *the* thing, that *experience* that will convince them that they are indeed saved. Their view is horizontal, they have heard of giants, and walled cities, impregnable fortresses. Why would they not believe that these things are already taken care of by God? Because they cannot see the truth for the tears (Malachi 3:13). Plain things bring about no emotion; done things bring about no place for people to react to circumstance because it gives them nothing to do.

2. Unbelief is dramatic and over-the-top in its response to grace (vv. 2-4). Compare this to the words spoken by Israel on the Canaan side of the Red Sea (Ex.15:1-18). Some might say that this wonderful treatise itself is over-the-top, but the fact is that it is all based on what God has done. The unbelief described in our text is based on believing a *lie*, a thing spoken against the truth. These wild ideas are opposed to the *rest* that God has secured. We do not have to ponder long to think that such over-the-top responses are the fodder of unbelief today. What do you hear when you declare the truth of salvation by sovereign grace? Unbelievers, superstitious independent unbelievers, voice fears that if it's all by grace that it will lead people to live like the devil; that will lead people to not pray; that will lead people to be careless about religious duty. If it is all done, that will make people have no care for lost souls! Unbelief is dramatic and over the top.

3. Unbelief desires a captain (v.4). Be sure to note this well. They desire a captain, but unbelief's desire is not for a captain that will deliver to the land of sweet rest but to the land of bondage. Egypt is a type and figure of works and freewill religion. Unbelief desires bondage and fears freedom. Let us make us a captain and let us return to Egypt. How painfully plain this is. Unbelief speaks of a Jesus who saves but then returns men to the bondage of works and will. Unbelief desires a Jesus who gets you started and leads you to Egypt for finishing. Go to a so-called Christian bookstore and look at the titles that speak of "How to get started," "How to live like a Christian," "the Christian father," "mother." Then try to find a book that says, "the promised land has been *secured* by God—possess it!" The people were miserable in Egypt, but knowing the familiar is better to the unbeliever than faith (Ex. 5:4-9; Gal. 5:1-5).

4. Unbelief always responds the same way to the truth (vv. 6-10a). "Kill the messenger." Now, to the believer, the news of salvation accomplished, salvation free and clear, is sweeter than honey and the

honeycomb. It is also reasonable and rational, and believers sometimes forget where they were when Christ found them. So, believers wonder why men hate the truth. Men do so because they are unbelievers. They desire a captain to take them back into the safety of bondage.

The *truth* will make you *free*. The *truth* is that God has secured Immanuel's land, and the proclamation of the gospel is "go thou up and possess it." The *truth* says be not afraid of the giants and the walled cities (2 Tim. 1:7). The *truth* is, that which is ours has already been possessed (Hebrews 6:17-20). Our joint heir has already arrived.

Read vv. 6-9, "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and *the LORD is with us*: fear them not.



THY GLORY AND THY POWER

Numbers 14:11-21

11, And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

12, I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

13, And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)

14, And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

15, Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

16, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

17, And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

18, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

19, Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

20, And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

21, But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

In the last study we looked at the rebellion of unbelief in the children of Israel as they disregarded the truth and believed the emotions and feeling of their own heart rather than the clear declaration of the gospel set forth by Caleb. This episode is of such import that God inspired the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews to use it as the defining example of unbelief. The punishment meted by God for this unbelief and the reward for belief is seen in verses 26-39. Every Israelite who was twenty years of age and older who joined in this blatant rebellion of unbelief would die in the wilderness and never see or possess the land of promise.

Their children, whom these rebels used as a sentimental excuse to not go up and possess (14:3; 31), would be the very ones who would march around Jericho, enter and possess the land flowing with milk and honey. These rebellious unbelievers would live for many years wandering in the desert, rearing the children who would possess the land, but they were under the sentence of death. So much so that God refers to their bodies as carcasses throughout this chapter. We will not spend much more time on this aspect of this chapter as it is covered abundantly in future studies. What I want us to see first in this chapter is the wonderful words and heart of Moses revealed, and in the next chapter the strange nature of unbelief as it is revealed in the last six verses of this chapter.

I've entitled this study *Thy Glory and Thy Power* as it is the subject and plea of Moses as he beseeches his God. That which is essential to God

is his glory. He is jealous for it and will not give it to another. It is clear that the exhibition of his glory in wrath is most profoundly revealed against unbelief. Unbelief attacks the veracity of God. Unbelief, the worst sort of sin and the mother of all other sin, is worthy of the wrath of God because it is standing eye to eye with God and calling him a liar (1 John 1:10; 5:9-10). Religion has succeeded in making unbelief just a matter of opinion or the embracing or not embracing of a particular philosophy of life. Religion has done so by exalting the decision of man as the final arbiter in all things, and by making the opinion of man of equal value with or of greater value than the word of God. Why else would men feel at such ease in looking square in the face of divine revelation and saying without batting an eye “I don't believe that.” Unbelief is not just your way of looking at a thing, it is a capital crime worthy of eternal death because of what it says about God and how it defames Him. These men who would pay the price of their lives had done no murder, committed no societal evil—they had *not believed* God (Psalm 138:1-2).

To understand the words of Moses, they must be viewed in the context of God speaking about his Glory. In verse 10 and in verse 21, the Lord speaks of his glory and that which follows are words and threats of wrath. God, when he reveals his glory here does so in anger against sin and the rebellion of unbelief. This is the jealousy of God for his glory. Jealously has to do with entitlement. With God it is true entitlement—He is entitled to absolute obedience, adoration and belief from his creation (Psalm 150:6). With men jealousy also has to do with entitlement, though it is a false perception. Men are jealous for their wives and vice-versa because they feel entitled to their total adoration. Since this is not so, the jealousy of men and women is not justified. God, however, is justifiably jealous for his glory because all glory belongs to him alone. When his glory is therefore impugned, he is justifiably and righteously indignant. God is a God of justice, all his ways are judgment, just and right is He.

In verses 11-12, God says some astounding things in anger. One might ask if God really means that he would do this. The answer can only be yes but must be viewed in the language of the covenant under which this is spoken. We will see that the eternal covenant is shrouded here but not completely invisible. The Old Covenant teaches us an immutable principle. Unbelief, your unbelief, my unbelief, all unbelief is unacceptable before God and is always worthy of eternal punishment and always brings about the anger of God. That ought to make us all rejoice in the fact that another's perfect belief and total absence of unbelief has been put on our account. The Old Covenant was conditional, therefore for God to say that he would shuck the whole outfit, make Moses into a great nation and later declare that those who rebelled against him would end up as carcasses in the wilderness is language that is consistent with a conditional covenant. Under this covenant it often appears that God changes, but the repentance that is attributed to God is his reacting to obedience or disobedience. A conditional covenant, by nature, requires reaction whereas an unconditional covenant requires only action (v. 34). Glory revealed in wrath is the only reasonable and righteous reaction to unbelief.

The words of Moses are the words of another covenant and are the words of one who is jealous for God's full and complete glory. God's glory is justice, but judgment is his strange work—He delights in *mercy*. How jealous is Moses for God's glory? He is so jealous for God's glory that he is not even interested in personal greatness and fame in light of the necessity that God be glorified. Moses speaks to the Lord of his sovereignty and how his Name would be a mockery if all those whom he brought out of Egypt were killed by him and replaced by another. The enemies of God would say that God was not able to perform what he had promised.

Remember the gospel—if all for whom Christ died are not kept to glory by God, then the enemies of the gospel have warrant to mock the name of God saying “you saved them but did not finish the job.” Those who preach, teach and believe that God intended to save all men by the death of Christ have not only permitted the mocking to begin but are themselves instigators of the mocking, whining and crying of those who won't make it to the other side. Being jealous for God's glory is being jealous for the ability of God to perform what he has promised (Isaiah 45:23-24, John 6:37-45).

Moses reminds God of his eternal covenant of Grace and the fullness of his glory, most assuredly revealed in justice but only fully revealed in justice satisfied, and mercy flowing as a great river of tender-kindness (Hab. 3:2). Moses asks the Lord to reveal the greatness of his power (v. 17). Note well that as Moses speaks such things, he is revealing that the display of wrath is not the true display of God's power. What will it be, a whirlwind, an earthquake, a calamity the likes of which has never been seen? What display of power does Moses speak of—the great *power* of God, the great *ability* of God—His *longsuffering* and *great mercy*. Moses cries for the Lord to be just and justifier, to do what only he can do, and that by the blood and righteousness of Christ, forgiving iniquity and in no wise clearing the guilty. Punish the guilty and forgive the sinner in the substitute vv. 18-19). This is the rehearsal of what God told Moses in Exodus 33:19-23 and spoke in 34:5-7.

Would you glorify God? Would you be jealous for his glory? Then be about the business of defending the glory of the accomplishments of his dearly beloved son Jesus Christ. Do not be of those who would mock the name of God by declaring that Christ has failed to save all whom he came to save. Listen again to one who is jealous for God's glory, “And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving

iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (vv. 17-18).

Will he pardon? Will he glorify himself in the salvation of sinners by the substitutionary work of Christ? (See: v. 20; John 12:28). And the LORD said, “I have pardoned according to thy word.” Do you see that—“according to thy word.” Our God honors his word; that which he has spoken is the upholding of this world.

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

MARVELOUS GRACE

Numbers 14:29-30; 15:2, 18

14:29, Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness: and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

14:30, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

15:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you,

15:18 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you,

In these passages you can plainly see what many might call a real contradiction. On the one hand, chap. 14 is the threat and promise of ruination to a people stating that God will not allow them into the land of promise. On the other hand, it is the glorious promise renewed stating that God has given them the land, and not only so, but will bring them into the land by his own hand (Chap 15).

The easiest way to see this in the proper prospective is to simply and joyously declare this is the grace of God, the Sovereign grace of God. We know that in chapter 15 our Lord is speaking to those who were under twenty years of age when they were delivered out of bondage of Egypt. He is not speaking to those whom he has promised would die in the wilderness and never see the promised land. Yet, he does not even mention the fact that there is a multitude here that he is *not* speaking to. It

is as if they do not exist. They are excluded from the conversation to the point that if we did not have chapter 14, we would not know that they even existed. This is sweet, sweet grace, powerful, purposeful grace that will succeed always and in every way. God has promised this land to his people and his word is his bond (Isaiah 14:24-27; 46:9-10; 55:11). His people will have the land that he gave to them, and he assures them of that fact by telling them that he himself will bring them into possession of it. How is such a promise made and kept? (See: Romans 9:4-8). In this glorious act of Almighty God rejecting some and receiving others, we see the principle of Grace.

After declaring that he has given his people the land and will bring them to it, he commands the people to make offering unto the Lord, and to keep the feast day and Sabbaths that he has ordained. Now, we know that these offerings, burnt, meat, peace, wave and drink offerings, pointed to and pictured the finished work of Christ, both God-ward and man-ward, and spoke to sin being paid for and put away, righteousness being imputed, peace established and accomplished, thanksgiving and praise to God for what he had done. The feasts all had to do with the rest that Christ accomplished for his people wherein they ceased from their labors and trusted God alone to provide for them, having provided all things for them in Christ.

No work was to be done on the Sabbaths because the work had already been accomplished by Christ. To work for what God had freely provided was a capital crime and was accompanied by death. Our Lord made this clear in verse 15-16 (one law, one manner or ceremony). The reason for such limited and strict dealing is that these people whom God had given the land and had promised to bring them to it, were to possess it by one law and one manner of ceremony. They would reach it by the Law of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-4), and they would possess it by the one manner of ceremony, the manner that allows God to be just and

justifier of him that believes (Romans 3:24-26), “the blood and righteousness of Christ.” Having considered that, I want us to consider some things about the context of the texts of this study.

In Chapter 14, we have a laundry list of what unbelief is and the manifold ways that it is revealed. We have a group of people being denied entrance into the promised land because of unbelief. They would never know or realize the promise of God because they did not believe God. They have no one to blame but themselves.

In chapter 15 we have a multitude of people who *will* enter into the promise Land according to the will and purpose of God. However, these are not said to enter in because they are believers. I do not doubt they are believers, but if you read the account in Hebrews explaining why the former do *not* enter, that account does not mention belief as the reason that some *will* enter. Those in the book of Hebrews are not told to strive to believe, because faith is not born of striving; it is the gift of God. In Hebrews 4:1-3a our Lord speaks of entering into rest through faith. The rest that he speaks of is the rest that our Lord entered into having finished the work of salvation (Heb. 4:9-11). That is why God emphasized one law and one manner—all having to do with these sacrifices, feasts and Sabbaths. If we do not enter, it is because of unbelief. If we do enter it is because of the sovereign Grace of God.

There are several things to consider. Unbelief is about us. It is the revelation of our rebellion against God. It is the revelation of our weakness. It is the declaration of our failure and our intrinsic inability to do anything that will move us closer to God. Unbelief is the spawn of all our sin and speaks of our natural disobedience. Unbelief and its effects only reach and affect us. Unbelief does not affect God. Now, he may not do mighty works because men do not believe, but he may also *not* do mighty works where men do believe. An example would be the Apostle Paul’s thorn in the flesh. Unbelief does not frustrate the grace of God.

Unbelief does not frustrate the purpose of God. Unbelief does not frustrate God (John 6:35-37; Romans 8:28; Daniel 4:35; Eph. 2; 1-10; Psalm 155; 135)

Grace hath brought you safe thus far, and grace will bring you home. Grace is sovereign and always victorious.

Read again the texts.

THE NATURE OF UNBELIEF

Numbers 14:39-45

39, And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly.

40, And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

41, And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.

42, Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

43, For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

44, But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

45, Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

This is the last part of a very definitive chapter in the word of God. According to the New Testament this chapter and chapter 13 define unbelief. When God inspired Paul to write to the Hebrew believers, he chose this chapter in Numbers to define why men will not enter into, embrace or believe God concerning the salvation accomplished by Jesus

Christ (Heb. 3:16-4-6). Scripture declares that these folks did not enter into the promised land because of unbelief.

This part of the chapter begins with Moses telling the people what God had commanded. God had commanded the people to turn back into the wilderness and remain there until God had killed, or death had claimed, every person who was above 20 years old at the time the nation had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. Only two of the original group (above 20 years of age) that went out of Egypt finally entered the promised land. They were Joshua and Caleb—the *Savior* and the *faithful dog*. Shortly following this chapter, God began to thin out the herd, beginning with Korah, Dathan and Abiram, then the 250 priest-wannabees, then above 14,000 murmurers and so on until some 40 years later they were all carcasses—even Moses and Aaron.

What was it that these did not believe? They did not *believe God* when he said that he had accomplished all things necessary for them in the matter of realizing the promise. He had secured the promise land in his *purpose*. Nothing had been required of them; they had put no effort in the obtaining of it. They had not raised one little finger in procuring this land. It was a gift. God had taken care of everything. Joshua and Caleb had told them to enter and possess what God had wrought for them, but they refused to go. Why? *Unbelief!*

This passage as well as many others shows the nature of unbelief—it is willful ignorance, intractable, irrational, unstable, rebellious and insane. Unbelief is insanity. Look at their response to the promise of God (vv. 13:30; 4:4; 6-10). Unbelief is emotional, whiny; not a dry eye in the house; dramatic; “I could just die; my wife; my babies.” Oh the humanity. Unbelief wants a captain, but not to take them to the land of milk and honey. Unbelief wants a captain, someone to help them fight their way back into bondage. Unbelief is murderous; “kill the preacher, we prefer the lie.” It is totally irrational!

Unbelief is not the absence of belief; it is the absence of believing *God*. Their unbelief was based on their believing that though God had promised, it was up to them to perform. They felt that they could not realize what God has accomplished for them because they knew that they personally could not defeat the giants in the land. Conversely, they believed if they could defeat the giants and lay siege on the walled cities, they could possess the land. In truth, they believed that salvation was conditioned upon *their ability* rather than *God's accomplishment*. This pictures the preaching of the gospel and unbelief's response to it. The gospel is the clear description of what the Lord has done for his people. He has accomplished salvation.

The gospel declares that Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Not only has he provided but also imputed perfect righteousness to them, accepted them and made them complete. Consequently, they have need of nothing (Col. 2:9-10—quote). “Go thou up and possess it.” This is what the gospel teaches. It is not an offer. It is not a plea. It is a proclamation that God has finished it; it is done. All for whom it was accomplished are eternally redeemed and secure in Christ (Eph 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-34). It is all by grace and received by believing God for it.

The unbeliever, however, is irrational. He looks at what God has done; he hears that the work is finished, and he says, “I can't do that, can't live up to that.” He looks at all that is *not* required of him and says I cannot do what is *not* required of me. He hears of righteousness, perfect righteousness imputed to all who believe, righteousness provided, righteousness that is Christ, and in unbelief, replies I can't produce it; I cannot produce what God has provided; I cannot produce what I'm *not* required to produce. It is always unbelief that endeavors to produce what God has not required of them and has fully provided in Christ. Men may call it reformed belief, but in truth, it is deformed unbelief. It is the making of yourself a captain to take you back to Egypt.

Unbelief is void of rational thought. Unbelief hears God say that he has done it all and nothing is required of you and then retorts “I cannot do what is not required of me” (John 8:45, 47 “And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not”). Just how rebellious is unbelief? Think for a moment of how unbelief was manifest in what we have seen thus far. In the face of God’s clear and gracious promise and God’s declaration that he was with them, they need not fear going up and entering into what he had procured for them. Rebellious unbelief says, “we will not go.” Why? Because unbelief does not believe that God has done it all, and clearly, unbelief is ready to do away with anyone who says God has done it all.

Now, in our text, the table is turned. God has commanded that the people turn their back on the promised land and begin wandering until most of them are corpses. The land is no longer available to them. They are now commanded to walk away from the promised land because God will not go with them. God, concerning what he has promised, rejects them. It is not theirs; they have neither right nor warrant to possess it. “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” The Lord says to this people, “You will be carcasses in the wilderness. Turn around and head for the desert. You cannot have Canaan. I will not go with you there.”

After Moses tells the people what the Lord has said, they are mourning the loss of what they, in unbelief, refused to possess. They are groaning because they cannot have what they *do not want* (v. 39). They cut off the light and wept because of the darkness. They are unbelievers and with that comes a strange belligerence, an audacious intractability. The fact is, unbelief must not and cannot ever believe. It will always act in rebellion against the truth. “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:47). Unbelief will never change to belief. Faith and unbelief are polar opposites. One does not slide out of error into truth, or as some say, “*Come to Grace.*”

In verse 40 we see the true nature of unbelief. When the Lord declared that they should go up and possess the land, they would not. Now, the Lord has said they cannot go up, and they say, “we are here, and *we* are going up to possess the land.” Note the reason they say they are going to possess it. They say they will possess it for the same reason God says they will not possess it. God said, you sinned therefore you cannot have the land. They say, we have sinned therefore we will possess the land. Now they are not saying that sin gives them rights to the land, but they're saying that by going up and possessing the land, they will undo or overcome the effect of their sin. They are saying “We have sinned, but now we are going to fix it. We're going to show God and impress him with our tenacity.” Far better their estate if they had said “we have sinned” and must now bear the consequence until we die as God has said.

But unbelief cannot act reasonably or rationally. Unbelief denies God his grace and also denies him his wrath. Unbelief denies that God is true. Unbelief always opposes God. Unbelief cannot and will not believe God—ever. It is the epitome of rebellion, even when warned again (vv. 41-43). The first phrase of v. 44 is the plainest definition of unbelief that anyone could come up with, “But they *presumed* to go up unto the hilltop.” They *presumed*. And what did they presume? They presumed that possessing the land really had always depended on their will and their ability, rather than the promise and the presence of God. The end of their presumption was utter defeat (v.45).

Verse 44 reveals a basic truth about unbelief whether one is opposing grace or opposing wrath. Both are revealed by the absence of Christ. If *you* are involved in the possession of the promise—it is without Christ. If you endeavor to overcome sin in direct opposition of God's warnings, you do so without Christ. “Nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.” Also, verse 44 glaringly reports

that unbelief does not change anything that God has purposed (John 6:35-37).

Here also a very practical application for us believers who struggle with unbelief all the time. If we live through a day, we will fail and falter many times. We will murmur when we ought to bow and believe ourselves when we ought to believe God. What shall we do when we realize our failures? Sadly, we usually, rather than fall on the mercy of Christ, knowing our sin has beset us, begin in our minds a program to undo our predicament. We deny the work of Christ, and start up the hill in our own power (Little Sisyphuses all, pushing the boulder of unbelief up the proverbial slippery slope of the mountain of do and undo), presuming that with more religious activity we can recover what we already fully possess, that which was bought for us by Christ. We apply to the offices of Dr. Praymore, Dr. Domore and Dr. Readmore who work at Conscience Clinic. They dispense the medicine of labor-intensive multi-tasking, but their pills are placebos and as long as we take their meds, our condition grows worse.

Believe! The heart of belief is ceasing from labor (Zeph. 3:13; Rom. 4:3-8). The heart of unbelief is that ultimately the outcome of a thing depends on us. “Preacher, I've done so many bad things, God could never forgive me.” So, you're saying that God saves only good people! You say, “Well, let me straighten out some things—clean up my life a bit.” So, you are saying God only saves people who are able to make themselves savable? Whether in slavish fears refusing to believe God or in presumptuous labor refusing to believe God, it is all unbelief. The joys of salvation, the blessedness of assurance come only—only—only by believing God. It is finished! Go thou up and possess the land that God has purchased with his own blood.

THE NATURE OF UNBELIEF

Numbers 14:39-45

39, And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly.

40, And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

41, And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.

42, Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

43, For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

44, But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

45, Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

Before us in the final part of chapter 14 is a true wonder. It is the wonder of the nature of unbelief. We know from our previous studies of this chapter that this is referred to in the book of Hebrews as the definitive example of unbelief. Scriptures declare that these folks did not enter into the promised land because of unbelief.

In this chapter, because the people will not believe and go on to possess what God has promised, God turns the nation back into the wilderness for 40 years to stay there until every rebel that was above 20 years old when they left Egypt would die in the desert. Only two of those who originally left Egypt, Caleb and Joshua, would enter the land of promise. The rest perished because of unbelief.

What was it that these did not believe? They did not believe that God had accomplished all things necessary for them in the matter of realizing the promise. He had secured the promise land in his purpose. Nothing had been required of them, they had put no effort into the obtaining of it. God had done it all, and Joshua had told them to enter into what God had wrought for them. Though unspoken, their unbelief was based on believing that though God had promised, it was up to them to perform. They felt that they could not realize what God has accomplished for them because they knew that they could not defeat the giants personally in the land. In truth they believed that salvation was conditioned upon their ability rather than God's accomplishment.

This pictures the preaching of the gospel and unbelief's response to it. The gospel is the clear description of what the Lord has done for his people. He has accomplished salvation. The gospel declares that Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, has provided and imputed a perfect righteousness to them, accepted them and made them complete, having need of nothing (Col. 2;9-10). This is what the gospel teaches. It is not an offer. It is not a plea. It is a proclamation that God has finished it. Salvation is done and all for whom it was accomplished are eternally redeemed and secure in Christ (Eph 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-34). It is all by grace and is received by believing God for it. The unbeliever looks at this and then, in the notions that he naturally has about being a child of God, he sees the giants of righteousness and the walled cities of legal requirements and fears that he cannot accomplish what was never required

of him to begin with. Unbelief is void of rational thought. Unbelief hears God say that he has done it all and nothing is required of you, and then unbelief says I cannot do what is not required of me (John 8:45).

Just how rebellious unbelief is—is seen in our text. Think for a moment of how unbelief was manifest in the first part of this chapter. In the face of clear and gracious promise, God's declaration that he was with them and his assurance they need not fear to go up and enter into what he had procured for them, rebellious unbelief says, “We will not go.” Why? Because unbelief does not believe that God has done it all and is ready to do away with anyone who says he has.

Now the table is turned. God has commanded that the people turn their back on the promised land and begin wandering until most of them are dead. For them the land is not available. They are now commanded not to go to possess the promised land because God will not go with them. God, concerning what he has promised, rejects them. It is not *theirs*; they have neither right nor warrant to possess it (Is. 7:9). The Lord says to this people, “You will be carcasses in the wilderness. Turn around and head for the desert. You cannot have Canaan. I will not go with you there.” After Moses tells the people what the Lord has said, they are mourning the loss of what they, in unbelief, refused to possess (v. 39). But they are unbelievers and with that comes a strange belligerence, an audacious intractability. The fact is, unbelief must not and cannot ever believe. It will always act in rebellion against the truth (John 8:47). Unbelief will never change to belief. Faith and unbelief are totally opposite

In verse 40 we see the true nature of unbelief. When the Lord declared that they should go up and possess the land, they would not. Now, the Lord has said that they cannot go up, and they say, “We are here, and we are going up to possess the land.” Note the reason they say they are going to possess it. They say they will possess it for the same reason God says they will not. God said, “You sinned therefore you *cannot* have

the land.” They say, “We have sinned therefore we *will* possess the land. No they are not saying that sin gives them rights to the land, but they say that by going up and possessing the land, they will undo or overcome the effect of their sin of not possessing the land? Far better their estate if they had said “We have sinned” and must now bear the consequence until we die as God has said.

But unbelief cannot act reasonably or rationally. Unbelief denies God his grace and is wrath. Unbelief denies that God is true. Unbelief always opposes God. It is the epitome of rebellion. Even when warned again (vv. 41-43). The first phrase of v. 44 is as plain a definition of unbelief that anyone could come up with. “But they presumed to go up unto the hilltop.” They *presumed*. And what did they presume? They presumed that possessing the land really had always depended on their will and their ability, rather than the presence of God. The end of their presumption was utter defeat (v.45). Verse 44 reveals a basic truth about unbelief whether opposing grace or opposing wrath, both are revealed by the absence of Christ. If you are involved in the possession of the promise, it is without Christ. If you endeavor to overcome sin in direct opposition of God’s warnings, you do so without Christ; “nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.”

There is also a very practical application to the believer who is yet struggling with unbelief. If we live through a day, we will fail and falter many times. We will murmur when we ought to bow and believe in ourselves when we ought to believe in God. What shall we do when we realize our failures? Sadly, we usually, rather than fall on the mercy of Christ knowing our sin has beset us, we don't bow to what may come. We begin in our minds a program to undo our predicament. We deny the work of Christ, and start up the hill in our own power, presuming that with more religious activity we can possess what was bought for us by Christ. The heart of belief is ceasing from labor (Rom. 4). The heart of unbelief is that

ultimately the outcome of a thing depends on us. Whether in slavish fears refusing to believe God or in presumptuous labor refusing to believe God, it is all unbelief.

The joys of salvation are only known by faith!



GOD IS FAITHFUL

Numbers 15:22-41

22, And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses,

23, Even all that the LORD hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations;

24, Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering.

25, And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their ignorance:

26, And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people were in ignorance.

27, And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering.

28, And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.

29, Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them.

30, But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

31, Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

32, And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33, And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34, And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35, And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36, And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.

37, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

38, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:

39, And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

40, That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

41, I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.

Last study we looked at the declaration of the grace of God in that he, in the fulfillment of his purpose, kept his promise to Israel to bring them to the promised land. In spite of their disobedience, in spite of their murmuring, in spite of their fear, our God abides faithful. What he has promised, he will do (Psalm 89:27-34; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Thes. 5:24; 2 Tim. 2:13). Though under the Old Covenant those over the age of twenty were to die in the wilderness and never see the land of milk and honey, yet the remainder would because God is gracious and faithful to his word. The turning of many into carcasses in the wilderness while delivering the rest to the promise land, sets God forth as a just God and a Savior (Isaiah 45: 21-22). This principle pointed to, pictured and typified throughout the Old Testament that which was only *fully* realized in the death of Christ. To name some: the slain beasts of the Garden of Eden; the flood in which only 8 were saved; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot recovered—all represent the elect of God dwelling in safety in Christ. God is faithful and he is gracious. He is so because of the sacrifice of Christ so clearly revealed in the offerings mentioned in the first part of this chapter.

What follows in the remainder of the chapter reveals the kindness as well as the justice of God. His kindness is revealed in the sacrifices commanded concerning sins committed in *ignorance* by the people. They were sins and therefore worthy of death, but God graciously accepts the death of a substitute, a sin offering and burnt offering that is a sweet smelling savor unto God (v. 24; Eph 5:1-2). God knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and in the death, life and righteousness of Christ, has provided for our manifold weaknesses. Though our sins must

for the most part be seen as willful, there is much, through ignorance and omission, we do against what we know to be right and good. Behold the mercy of God and rejoice in his tender mercies.

Also, for those who sin presumptuously the justice of God is revealed without mercy (vv. 30-31). This presumptuous sin is revealed as a reproach to God (v. 30), despising the word of God (v. 31), and breaking the commandment of God (v.31). The punishment for such sin is that the soul of such shall be utterly cut off, and that without mercy, as revealed by the fact that his iniquity would remain on him. It is important to notice that in the matter of sins of ignorance (referred to as *erring* v. 22) and not observing all the commandments (v.22), no specific error is mentioned. However, the sacrifices offered and the atonement made is very specific. All sin is paid for in the same way, by offering made to God by the priest (v.29). In the matter of the sin of presumption, there is no offering and therefore the punishment is death. But also note that this sin is not named as to what it is, or even if there are a number of sins that fall into this category. Only what this sin *reveals* is declared (vv. 30-31; Psalm 19:13; 2 Pet. 2:10). This presumption ultimately has to do with the attitude one has toward government or authority. It is basically an opposition to authority and government, and therefore is opposition to Christ upon whose shoulder the government rests and the one who has been given *all* authority in heaven and earth (Isaiah 9:6; Matt 28:19; John 17:2).

To presume to know better than God, to know more than Christ, is an offense of capital consequence. We ourselves, even as grown-ups, who may have some derived authority as parents, bristle when we see someone presuming to take part in what is not theirs to take part or show disrespect to authority or to the ancients. Think then of what wrath is due those who presume to know better than God knows and prove it by reproaching God, despising his word and breaking his commandments on purpose, as if to say, “We will not have this God reign over us.” This becomes of

paramount importance by the description of the height of presumption revealed in the verse 32. Now we, having the benefit of the whole word of God, know that the penalty for such a thing is death, and we know why!

However, these at this time were not aware of what penalty God had ascribed for picking up a stick on the Sabbath. They knew that there was an infraction committed because in all the Sabbaths and feasts there was a prohibition of any servile work. However, only one holy convocation, in the Book of Leviticus, declared death as a result of doing a work on that day. That was the day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-29). This Sabbath in our text, not being the Day of Atonement, therefore had no assigned penalty for picking up sticks. This being so put that man in a ward or in custody until they heard from God what the penalty was. The penalty that God gives, death (vv. 35-36), reveals that *all* the Sabbaths, even the Sabbath day, have to do with the finished work of Christ and resting from all labor because there is nothing left to be done. This also teaches us that to work when you are commanded to rest in the finished work, is the heart, nature and revelation of what presumption is. The penalty for presuming that your work may be added to that of Christ is the sin of presumption and will end in your eternal demise. It is no anomaly that God, after setting forth the penalty for presumptuous sin, immediately reveals the penalty for picking up a stick on the day of rest to be death, the proper punishment for despising the Day of Atonement.

Finally, the Lord gives the children a way to remind themselves to obey his commandments. *Now* the believer has this reminder in an internal manner (Jer. 31:33; Hebrews 10:16). Under the Old Covenant, everything had to do with sight. The Lord tells the people to sew a blue ribbon on the fringe of their garments. These fringes were a kind of loop, and the ribband was a plaited cord that went through the loops and served to draw the garment as a draw string. They were there for the specific purpose of showing that the commandments of God were from heaven (represented

by the color blue) and that they were to keep the word of God. By wearing these blue ribbons, they were to constantly see and be reminded that their walk, their work and their raiment was about eternity, about God and where he is. These ribbons would remind them that they were to be separated unto the God who delivered them out of Egypt vv. 40-41).

This is a kindness, but as all things that men can see, they ultimately become the only thing that men want you to see. By the time we reach the days of our Lord on this earth, this kind reminder had become a means of self-righteous display. The Pharisees had then adopted this reminder as a reminder not to themselves, but to others of just how well they did in the law keeping business. Look at Matthew 23:5. “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments.” The Pharisees had made their ribbands bigger and wider to show that whereas some kept the law, they did it better and bigger, and the size of their blue ribbon was proof of their holiness, sanctification and love for the law. I would not be surprised to find that *our* blue ribbon of competitive glory has its etymology in the self-glory of the Pharisee.

No principle of the Old Covenant can stand the test of faith. If it can be seen, it will consummate in self-righteousness. The believer walks by faith and not by sight. He wholly disowns, disallows, and disavows anything that the world considers to be evidence of salvation (Rom. 8:24).

THE GAINSAYING OF KORAH

Numbers 16:1-33

1, Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men:

2, And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

3, And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

4, And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:

5, And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

6, This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;

7, And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

8, And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

9, Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

10, And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

11, For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

12, And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:

13, Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?

14, Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.

15, And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.

16, And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:

17, And take every man his censur, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censur, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censur.

18, And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.

19, And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.

20, And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

21, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.

22, And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

23, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

24, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

25, And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.

26, And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.

27, So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

28, And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.

29, If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me.

30, But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.

31, And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them:

32, And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

33, They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

In the last chapter, we looked into the latter part of the fifteenth chapter of Numbers and saw that presumptuous sins were worthy of and brought about the sentence of death. The sin first named, after the introduction of the punishment of presumptuous sin, was the sin of picking up a stick on the Sabbath. We saw that the children of Israel did not immediately know what the punishment for this sin was, or if it fell in the category of a sin of ignorance or a presumptuous sin. God placed the sin in the latter and the man was put to death. The *presumption* was to *add* the works of man to the *finished* work of Christ.

We then saw the kindness of God in telling his people to put fringes on the borders of their garments and to lace through the fringes a cord of blue, or a blue ribband, to remind the people that the commands of God came from heaven and not men. Sadly, this too, by the time of the coming

of our Lord had become a presumptuous sin because the Lord accused the Pharisees of enlarging the borders of their garments so that men could see that their works of obedience were great and worthy of recognition.

The word of God flows with wondrous accuracy. After speaking of the blue ribband that reminded the people that the commandments came from heaven and not men, the *next* presumptuous sin is declared in the sin of Korah, along with his cohorts Dathan, Abiram and others numbering 250 in all. These men, by their actions and words denied the word of God, denied that the commandment came from God and accused Moses of lording his position over the people in coming up with stuff for them to do (vv. 1-3; 12-13). Korah's accusation against Moses was that he took too much upon himself, when the fact was that Moses, the meekest of all men, had neither desired nor applied for the position in which God had placed him. Their attack was against *government*—against *authority*. They as much as said, “Everyone here has the same place that you have; everyone here is just as good as you are; why do you put yourself up on a pedestal to rule over us?”

In the New Testament this man Korah is recorded as one of those who are presumptuous before God, whose destiny is the utter and complete severing from the people, and finally, death at the hand of God. In 2 Peter 2:10-11 and then in Jude 10-11 we see God's warning against such presumption. We also see Korah lumped in with three others who are guilty of such presumption before God. Balaam presumed to speak for God or say right things about God while, at the same time, encouraging a duke's mixture of pagan religion with the truth. Such are those who claim to proclaim grace but give credence to false teaching by embracing as brethren those who believe a lie.

Cain presumed that his indignation was more worthy than God's. Cain presumed that God had no right to require *blood* for sin and proved it by approaching God with the fruits of his labors. However, when it came to

the fact that he was himself humiliated, he presumed that his anger could only be satisfied by *blood* and proved it by murdering his brother. He presumed to possess rights that God did not; he despised government.

Then our Lord warns about Korah (Greek: *core*). In Jude, the accusation against Core is “gainsaying.” What does that mean? Gainsaying means rebellion, contradiction, opposition and speaking out against. Korah was indeed speaking out against Moses, but his hatred was for God, his rebellion was against God, he was contradicting God and he was in opposition to God. Of course, because of its connection with the others mentioned in 2 Peter and in Jude, we know that the sin here committed was a presumptuous sin, and therefore worthy of death. These men despise authority and speak evil of dignities.

There can be no doubt that this has an application to those who have been called to pastor us, but as pastors we must be careful here not to press this past its meaning. The pastor is spoken of in three ways as to his relationship with the flock that God has given him to feed.

First, he is to rule them, in spiritual matters, to stand in the place of Christ beseeching them to be reconciled to God. He is never to rule in a manner as to Lord over them but as one who must give account for their souls.

Secondly, the Pastor is the servant of the flock. His is to act as such. He is to take the brunt of sorrow, to bear their burdens, to be where the buck stops concerning them.

Thirdly, the pastor is said to be the property of the flock. Paul when speaking of himself as well as Apollos and others said, “We are yours.”

We pastors must never be caught up in a sense of entitlement, but always behave in a manner that the flock would know that this task was given by God, and he does not say these things because we have an agenda of our own (1 Kings 18:36-37).

If we consider a couple of things, we will better understand this sin of Korah. It is much more than rebellion against pastoral authority. The words of our Lord to his disciples says that “If the world hated them, it was because the world hated him first” So any attack on so-called pastoral authority is on the true authority of Christ (folks just can't get their hands on Christ). The second thing to consider is that this sin is revealed in the context of “presumptuous and therefore death-worthy sins.” As we have seen, all presumptuous sin is ultimately revealed in reference to the person and work of Christ. So, this sin of Korah, this gainsaying of Korah is about Christ and his work.

To see it clearly, we must look at what Korah's place was in the economy of the tabernacle and what he desired to be. First Korah's place as a son of Kohath was to be a bearer of the Ark, the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the golden altar (Numbers 4:4-15). The sons of Kohath were ministers in the tabernacle but were never to touch the things that they bore upon their shoulders. They could carry them, but they could not put their hands to them. Only the priests and the high priest could touch the holy things. Only the sons of Aaron were truly priests.

Now look at what Moses said of Korah and those who followed him. In verses 4-7, we see by what Moses says and requires these 250 to do that their crime was much more heinous than opposition to Moses' authority. They wanted to be what they had neither right nor warrant to be. They wanted to be priests (vv. 8-11). “We will see,” says Moses, “whom the Lord has chosen,” who are indeed his priests (v.7; 2 Peter 2:5,9). The sin of presumption is that sin of the minister who asserts himself into that which belongs only to Christ and his work. He presumes to touch the holy thing that only Christ may touch and offer unto God, the sacrifices that only the priest may offer by, or based upon, the person and work of Christ. As Aaron and his sons represent Christ, the High Priest (who by himself entered once into the holy place not made with hands, obtaining eternal

redemption for his people, the people whom Christ has saved by his blessed blood), Korah represents all or any who would assert themselves into the work of salvation calling themselves the product of the work of Christ, a holy and redeemed people. God will countenance no such presumption. He will have no rival to his Son.

Men spend their lives in useless religion, claiming to have a part in the salvation of their souls, claiming to make the work of Christ effectual by their affirmative vote, claiming to be the children of God, holy and secure (Matt. 7), claiming to be able to do only what God's children can do in offering the acceptable sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God. But those who claim anything to do with their salvation are not the children of God. What awaits those who claim such things? They may well go to hell with their shoes on and a Bible in their hand. Be assured that there is an order in which God has operated. In that order, Christ has preeminence. No glory that Christ has earned will be allowed to be claimed by another.

“And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation” (vv. 31-33).

BUT ON THE MORROW

Numbers 16:41

41, But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

The people of God have been witness to the justice of God against presumptuous sin, the desire to be as Christ and to share in his glory as priest. The Earth has opened her mouth and swallowed the offenders and vindicated Moses and Aaron. God has showed himself to be the God of justice. The people, it would seem, have been taught a very important lesson (Ps. 89:7; Deut. 4:24, Hebrews 12:29; Heb 10:31). However, the fact is that men and women do not learn from being judged, nor do they turn after being punished (Isaiah 1:5). Fear does not bring about repentance; it is the *goodness* of God that leads men and women to repent. Korah desired and believed himself entitled to the office of priest, to be a part of the matters of sacrifice before God, to intrude himself in the work of Christ, and God turned him into a tid-bit for the gullet of the Earth. Immediately after the earth had consumed her supper, “there came out a fire from the Lord” (v.35) and consumed the 250 that burned incense. These worms of the dust had raised their heads thinking to be crowned with honor but instead were charred beyond recognition.

All that was left of the bunch were the brazen censers that they used, and these were put to the use for which they were designed, they were made as plates to cover the brazen altar as a memorial for Israel to remember what it is to exalt yourself when you should be humbling yourself before the Lord. These were a memorial of the fact that if you are

not the high priest or his son, you have neither right nor warrant to intrude in the matters of salvation, no right at all (vv.36-40). Poor stupid man is sillier than the moth that thrusts herself into the candle flame, because man, at least, has the capacity of rational thought, yet would play the ignoramus to get glory for himself.

In this day when men and women seek recognition and glory, and have interloped into matters of grace, it must seem foolish to find one who is content to be where God has placed them. Bourroghs said, “Christian contentment is a rare jewel.” God is against the proud. If a person exalts himself, God's economy demands that that one be abased. Nothing is more obvious, more discomfiting and more of a contradiction than for a person who claims to believe that salvation is by grace to be proud, haughty and presume influence with God. The scriptures declare “He that exalteth himself shall be abased.” C.H. Mackintosh said, “If we are to be governed by the rule of God's kingdom, we shall find that the only way to get up is to go down.”

Our text teaches what we have already seen and learned thus far about the nature and the insanity of unbelief. In verse 41 the first word is “but.” This is spoken in opposition to what the reaction of the people ought to have been to the memorial that reminded them that their salvation depended upon the priest to deal with God for them and *only* the high Priest. “But,” oh my, “but, on the morrow,” not a week later or a year later, but as soon as the sun rose and a new day began, the people murmured against Moses and Aaron. Unbelief can never believe! Unbelief can never possess rational thought! With the stench of crispy human flesh still in the air, with the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram up for rent, with the polished plates covering the brazen altar as reminders of how God deals with pride and presumptuous sin, the congregation murmurs against their leader and High Priest who collectively represent Christ as head of the church and the church's great High Priest.

Note well, that those who fled in fear just the day before (v. 34) now murmur. Not just a few as with Korah and his gang of 250, not just the families of the less than three hundred slain, but “all the congregation” murmured. Yesterday, the entire congregation fled in fear. Today the entire congregation murmur. Unbelief is madness and is maddening. These evidently believed that what had happened the day before had nothing to do with God. These evidently believed that Korah and his cohorts had a right to be priests. These evidently believed that though God declared that they could not make it through the wilderness without the high priest, they were convinced that they could.

Look at the accusation laid at the door of Moses and Aaron (v. 41). “You've killed some fine people, some good Christians, some God-fearin' Sunday-go-to-meetin' folk!” Sound familiar?

“Why are you so hard to say that unless folk believe the gospel a certain way that they are lost. Don't' you know that these are fine people over at the Bapto-Charismo-Ecumenico-Evangelico-Bible-Thumpin Free-Will Grace and Works Church of the Living God in Christ Advent Assembly. They pray, they give, they attend, they labor, and you say that they are lost because they deny that God alone, through the work of the High Priest alone is the salvation of the elect.”

Yes! that's what I say.

“Well, who do you think you are to kill such fine folk? They are God's people.”

No! They are infidels, and their unbelief, as does all unbelief (mine included) deserves the wrath of the just and right God of this universe (vv. 42-45).

God has started the plague. It is consuming the people in a moment. But God will not destroy them all, though justice demands death for sin. God also must be gracious, he must be merciful, he must act in love as well as wrath.

How can this be? Look at verse 46-48. It is only by the High Priest taking the censer (as only he is allowed) and with fire from off the brazen altar and incense in his hand to put on the coals stands between God's wrath and the hell deserving sinner, the dead and those yet alive. These yet alive, though deserving eternal death, picture the elect of God. Aaron pictures Christ. The fire from the brazen altar signifies that sin has been punished and the incense represents the intercessory, substitutionary work of the Savior.

It appears that these folks will not make it through the wilderness without a High priest after all, nor will you. Don't be so foolish as to think otherwise. The plague was stayed because of the work of the High Priest—the very person that these people by nature despised. You and I were born hating Christ (Romans 8:7-8). He, in his death and life, stood between the wrath of God and us by becoming sin for us. He did this before we existed, and when we began to exist, we hated him. It was not until God gave us faith to overcome this world of unbelief in our heart that we began to love him for his grace.

It is all here for us in this last part of Chapter 16—God glorified as the just God and the Savior. Christ is revealed as substitute, intercessor and stayer of the plague, as the effectual Great High Priest. We are revealed in the wretchedness of our rebellious unbelief, ruinous depravity and as the objects of the gracious work of our blessed Redeemer. Had God killed the entire congregation, his great name and manifold attributes would not have been fully glorified, but in glorious substitution, they all were. Justice, grace, intercession, mercy, and love were all displayed here in this final part of chapter 16. (See Isaiah 48:9-11).

We are in the wilderness, strangers and pilgrims and sojourners here. Thank God for our High Priest who intercedes for us. Even when we do not believe, yet he abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself.

THE FINAL WORD

Numbers 17:1-18:1-8

Numbers 17:1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod.

3, And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers.

4, And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you.

5, And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.

6, And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods.

7, And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.

8, And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.

9, And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod.

10, And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.

11, And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he.

12, And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish.

13, Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?

Numbers 18:1, And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

2, And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness.

3, And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.

4, And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you.

5, And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.

6, And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

7, Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

8, And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever.

In verse 5 of chapter 17, our Lord gives the reason for this matter of the rods assigned to the tribes as being that the children will cease their murmurings against Moses and Aaron. This will not cause the murmuring to stop altogether but will once and for all settle the issue of the priesthood and the ministry concerning what belongs to the priesthood and what belongs to the ministry. God is as much as saying, “after this, there can be no more question as to whom I have chosen to be priest.”

Our God is the God of distinction. He has made distinction among the inhabitants of this world by election. He has made distinction in his church by declaring the head to be Christ and the church his body. He has made distinction between the priesthood and the ministry. This distinction between the priesthood and the ministry is clearly defined, pictured and declared in the context of Numbers 17 and 18.

When our Lord told Moses to take twelve rods, one for each tribe of the children of Israel, the first distinction he made was to put the name of Aaron on the rod that belonged to the tribe of Levi. This is important because it is that matter (concerning what belongs to the priesthood and what belongs to the ministry) that God is dealing with. The Levites were those who supported the upkeep of the tabernacle, appointed as ministers to carry the elements of the tabernacle from place to place. Within that tribe was the family of Aaron who were designated as the priesthood, those that attend the matters of sacrifices, the altar, mercy seat, etc.

These two were never to mix. The sons of Korah had tried and were swallowed up by the earth. Now, with the rods, God is going to settle the matter once and for all, not only by distinguishing Aaron as his choice vessel for the priesthood and making a distinction from the other tribes to be sure, but more to make that distinction *within* the tribe of Levi. This is to let all know that the issue is not national election in Israel or election of Grace in true Israel, but rather distinction within the church, the tribe of Levi. This whole thing is about the priesthood and the ministry.

What then was proven by Aaron's rod budding?

First it proved that Aaron's family was designated as the priesthood. The first thing taught by this is that Christ is the head of the church (v.3).

Secondly, it is taught that the people will make it through the wilderness because of the work of Christ. They will arrive in the land of promise by grace, wholly based upon the work of the priesthood. They will not work themselves; the priest will work for them. How wonderful this is to see and understand that our sojourn here is not conditioned upon our ability to keep-on keeping-on but wholly on the work of Christ. We are kept by the power of God and will be brought home on the wings of mercy and grace. When all is done the song will be "Worthy is the Lamb."

Thirdly, the fact that Aarons rod sprang forth to life and fruitfulness represents the truth that God alone causes one to differ from another. What

could any member of the respective tribes say was their contribution? *All* the rods were laid before God, and God said that he would make *one* bloom, thus proving that he had chosen that one.

Fourthly, the fact that only Aaron's rod bloomed pictured that life and vitality belongs only to Christ. One description of what took place was that the rod of Aaron grew "branches." This surely is a reference illuminated in John 15.

Fifthly, Moses was a member of the tribe of Levi. Yet his name was not on the rod. Why? His name was not there because he represents the Law, and the law is not what will get the people to Canaan.

Finally, this act of God truly had to do with the church. Though the rest of the tribes had their rods presented before God, he was settling the issue of the *ministry* and the *priesthood* so there would be no grounds for murmuring any longer. This began with Moses being instructed to put Aaron's name on the rod instead of Levi's and ended with God causing the rod to bloom.

There is a great deal of instruction in this passage. We know that ultimately this is in reference to the church in the world. That is the wonder of the Old Testament. All those things happened to teach us about something else. These things took place to teach us how God has set up his church in the world. The church is made up of the priesthood and the ministry. God himself distinguishes one from the other. The high priest's office is occupied by Jesus Christ. So finally, though there is a priesthood and a ministry, there is but one who represents us to God and but one who has and will receive all the glory for getting us from the bondage of Egypt to the milk, honey and freedom of the promised land. The high priest is the head of the church, and he resides at the right hand of the majesty on high.

The first thing to recognize is that there is no *earthly* priest. No man on earth has the position of priest which distinguishes him from the rest of the body. The papist notion of the priest-confessor as one who can give or

withhold absolution is blasphemy. Every member of the body of Christ is a priest and collectively makes up the priesthood. Just as Aaron was the high priest and his family designated as the priesthood, Christ is the Great High Priest and his family make up the priesthood. Peter makes that clear in his epistle to the church (1 Peter 2:5, 9). If you are Christ's, then you are a priest individually and a member of the priesthood collectively. Now this does not give you power to absolve anyone of sin. Indeed, you may forgive a brother or sister if they have wronged you, but you do that because they have already been absolved by Christ and so have you (Col. 3:12-13).

The privilege of the priest in the Old Testament was not to absolve men of sin but to offer to God that which pictured the one who would put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The privilege of the priest in the church is to offer spiritual sacrifices (invisible and indiscernible to the natural man) through the merits of Christ. The sacrifices that the holy and royal priesthood offers are what the peace offerings (Lev. 7:11-12) pictured in the Old Testament. They pictured *thanksgiving* and *praise* for what was accomplished on the brazen altar (the satisfaction of God for sin). (Compare Hosea 14:2 with 1 Peter 2:5c with Hebrews 13:15.)

What then of the ministry? Look at Eph. 4:11-12.

11, And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12, For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Within the body, the church, and for the edification of the body, God has instituted the ministry. These ministers are not priests, in the sense of religion's notion of priests. They are priests as they are members of the body and no more. They have no more to offer God than any other member of the body. And taking the Old Testament type and the

declaration of the New Testament, it is apparent that they, though they are ministers, being the most visible parts, are not the most important parts or vital parts of the body. Their distinction from the priesthood is primarily one of rank and has to do with the fact that they are not the head of the church, Christ is. The church is a family, the family of God, the brotherhood of Christ. What our Lord is teaching is this. The minister, though part of the tribe, has a different function than the priest. The minister is to carry the elements, which picture Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. He is to carry the *gospel*, the good tidings of accomplished salvation, the food that strengthens and edifies the people.

The priest's job is to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. The minister's job is to carry the stuff upon which the offerings are made. The minister brings Christ, the brazen altar, the brass laver, the table, the show bread, the altar of incense, the incense, the fire, the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat all covered and wrapped by the High Priest. It is the high priest's job to uncover the elements and reveal their meaning so that the priests will have a *basis* for the thanksgiving and praise—the finished work of Christ (1 Cor. 3:5-7; 2 Cor. 4:1-7). The minister tells the people who Christ is, what he has done, where he is now and why. Christ reveals himself to his people, reveals that he has made them to be kings and priests to God, and by him they offer the words, the calves of their lips, the fruit of their lips, the praise and thanksgiving due him for what he has done.

The simplest way to put all of this is that God shows us in this passage a distinction of function in the body, while at the same time, showing an inner dependency. The ministry is not the priesthood and the priesthood is not the ministry. The church is not the church without a pastor, and the pastor is not a pastor without the church, and both are utterly dependent upon the rod of Aaron, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest (Isaiah 11:1).



THE RED HEIFER - PART 1

Numbers 19:1-4

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

2, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

3, And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face:

4, And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:

Just before the turn of the millennium I heard a news report that a red heifer had been born in Israel. The Hasidic elders were dancing in the streets of New York saying it was a sign from God. It seems that the birth of the blushing bovine held a big place in Jewish tradition. Tradition held that every 1000 years a red heifer had been born and slain in Israel since the days of the wilderness. This tradition was one of Jewish imaginations since it is recorded only one time in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. As I listened to the report, I wondered how long it would be before the pre-millennial, pre-tribulation rapture eschatologists would jump on the band wagon. I was pretty sure two things would pique their interest. The tradition, occurring every 1000 years (a millennium), and the fact that the world was approaching the year 2000, a number the pre-

millennial, pre-tribulation rapture eschatologists held very dear to their heart, would prove irresistible to their latter-day mentality.

I didn't have to wait long. The very next Sunday morning, a preacher in Asheville who has a program on channel 13, was beside himself all-a-blubbered with joy as he worked up the congregation with the report of the birth of the rose-colored ruminant. The little heifer had been named "Melody," and the preacher worked himself into a lather talking about the reestablishment of Israel, the tearing down of the Mosque of Omar, the rebuilding of the Temple, and possibly even offering up sweet Melody on the newly erected brazen altar. He ventured that all of this could possibly coincide with the return of Christ in the year 2000, and misrepresented Isaiah 66:8 as speaking of the nation Israel being born suddenly.

He offered his messages in a two-cassette series for a love-gift of 10 bucks. The series was entitled "Holy Cow" and would be issued to coincide with the preacher taking a bunch of folks to the "Holy Land" with a scheduled stop at the sacred stall of "Melody" the Red Heifer. I suppose that now, to both the Hasidic Jews of NY and that prophetic pulpiter of Asheville, Melody was a bust. That scarlet simmental should have been called "McMelody," because she was just hamburger on the hoof. There was so much wrong with the thinking of that preacher in Asheville that it would take a volume of books to point it out.

Let me give you something to take home with you. Any notion of the last days that has natural Israel erecting a temple and offering up beasts that can never take away sin, is in direct opposition to the Lamb of God, who *did* put away sin, and is therefore *antichrist*.

Is the red heifer important? Of course, it is. It is part of the word of God and therefore is there to teach us about Christ and his work that honored God and redeemed his people. The first thing to note about the red heifer is its singularity. It is mentioned only *once* in the Old Testament here in Numbers and *once* in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9. Christ has

“appeared *once* in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” and “by *one* offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.” The sprinkling of blood in v.4 is never mentioned in the rest of the chapter. Why? Once is all that is needed if that once is effectual (Hebrews 10:18).

As we look at this red heifer and what she teaches, it is important to remember where Israel was when this took place. She was in the wilderness and pictured the church in the world. This sacrifice was not part of the Levitical ceremonies prescribed in the book of Leviticus. This sacrifice was a wilderness sacrifice and therefore must be viewed as having something to do with the people of God in their sojourn in this world. This sacrifice is *not* the putting away of sin, the satisfaction of justice, the imputation of righteousness and the propitiation before God. All of that was accomplished *in* the tabernacle and later in the Temple in type and picture looking to fulfillment in Christ.

This sacrifice is in fact a picture of the church in the world and how she deals with the defilement of living in this evil world. This sacrifice pictures how the church is cleansed from the defilement of the world. Since Christ was crucified once, and the matter of sin and its consequence settled forever with God at Calvary, this sacrifice is about understanding and believing what Christ accomplished at Calvary. Are we cleansed of the defilement of the world by crucifying Christ anew? Does something we do cleanse us? No, the blood of Christ shed once both cleansed and cleanses us (Heb. 9:12).

Several things:

(v.2). First, the fact that this was a *red* heifer is very significant. The word “red” is *Adam* in the original language and refers to the dirt from which Adam was formed. “Adam” literally means red dirt man. This signifies the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though not a son of

Adam, He, as Adam was, is the representative of his people and in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is called the Last Adam.

Secondly, the sacrifice is *female*. Our Lord was a male, the son of God. This is specific. This is a *wilderness* ordained sacrifice. It is for the church in the world. It is for the *bride* of Christ. This shows the identification our Lord had with his elect in his death and life. He is her head; she is his body. When he lived in perfection, she lived in perfection, when he died she died, when he was buried, she was buried, when he arose, she arose, when he ascended, she ascended and when he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on High, so did she (Psalm 22:6; 40:12; Isaiah 53:10-12)!

Thirdly, this red heifer was *without spot or blemish*. This is a term that is continually applied to our Lord declaring him fit to be a suitable sacrifice to God for sinners. In his nature, he was spotless (v. 2 “Wherein”). The heifer also said to be one *upon* whom never came a yoke. This speaks to our Lord's birth and his relationships. He never bore, naturally the yoke of sin as do all that are born of Adam. The yoke was not intrinsic to Christ. He voluntarily put on the yoke of submission to his father and wore it throughout his earthly career even to the cruel death of the cross. He, however, was personally without sin. The yoke of sin was not on him (whereon).

(v.3) Here the red heifer is given to Eleazar the priest. He was to bring her outside the camp and there she was to be slain. Note well, that Eleazar did not slay the heifer but was to be witness to the slaying. The text simply says, “one shall slay her before Eleazar's face.” Also, in verse 5 it says one shall burn the heifer in front of Eleazar. This is a divine leap from the Old Testament to The New Testament. Christ was not slain by the Old Testament priesthood, nor was he slain by the Law that made them priests. He was slain by God the Judge to the satisfaction of all the law. Christ died before the law, in front of the Law, before the face of the Law. Now,

the Law gives witness to the effectual accomplishment of that sacrifice. All the Law and the Prophets gave witness to Christ. This teaches also that Christ's priesthood is not an earthly priesthood but a heavenly one (Hebrews 8:1-4; 9; 11-12, 24). All the earthly priests offered *often* the same sacrifices that could never put away sin, but this Man...! Christ did not die as a priest, he died as a voluntary victim. He lives as a priest.

(v. 3) This sacrifice was to be outside the camp. This also signifies that this was not the act of the earthly priesthood. The priest's work was attendant to the tabernacle which sat in the midst of the camp. He lived, breathed and served in that particular place and capacity. This sacrifice of the heifer is to take place outside the camp. It was the same in Jerusalem. When our Lord was slain, he was the Lamb of God, but he was not slain on the altar in the Temple. He suffered without the camp (Hebrews 13:12). To understand the significance of this we must see the camp for what it is.

In the Old Covenant, the *camp* typifies the world and its religion. It is no small thing that our Lord called those who strictly adhered to the Old Covenant as unbelieving, un-hearing devil worshippers (John 8). Nor is it a coincidence that Paul refers to the Judaizers and their practices in his letters to Galatia and Colossi as against Christ and of the world. The slaying of our Lord was not part of that religious system—outside the camp—outside the gate. Is it any wonder that as we live in this world, we are not to take part in the religious ways that it extols (Hebrews 13:13; Gal. 1:4)? Our worship is not to be as their worship, nor are we to give credence to their practices. Let us go forth to him outside the camp.

(v.4) The priest was then to take the blood, and with his finger, sprinkle it directly (before the face) seven times before the congregation and the tabernacle. Remember, this sacrifice was not made by the priest, was not slain by the priest, was not prepared on the brazen altar, nor was the blood sprinkled on that altar or upon the mercy seat. The priest had to come back into the camp with the blood of the sacrifice which he had

himself witnessed being slain and sprinkle the blood before the congregation and the tabernacle. Is this not the picture of the declaration of the perfect sacrifice, the preaching of the gospel of sovereign and sufficient grace? Is this not a declaration to both the people and their religion that salvation has been accomplished without their input? Is this not the declaration of perfect salvation (v. 7)? This heifer's death did not save this people, it was a reminder that salvation is of the Lord. Does this not also teach the greatest mission field to be that which calls itself the church?

I'm going to stop here and resume with verses 5-22 in the next chapter. In the meantime, consider a very important thing. This sprinkling of the blood seven times is a declaration of the only ground where the consciences of the sojourners in this evil world can meet with God. What can be done about the defilement that affects and infects us because we live in this evil world? Shall we endeavor to cleanse ourselves by works of the law, by religious ritual, by becoming hermits and separating from the world? What is a child who is defiled by living in this world to do? How shall he or she be cleansed? By believing and believing alone (Heb. 9:13-14). This seems radical to the world and its religion. To the child of God, it is the only reasonable and sensible thing.

Our Lord's blood has been shed and presented to the Holy God as the perfect propitiatory payment for sin. There is nothing before God but this perfect sacrifice. Sin has been judged; our sins have been obliterated by the precious blood of Christ. Only believing the fact of this will allow you to enter into perfect knowledge of perfect cleansing. We do not honor Christ, nor do we exalt his work by seeking any other avenue of cleansing than that we *have been* cleansed.

It is not a sign of spirituality to deny what God has done for us in Christ and has declared to be so in his word. (Ps. 119:9 not doing—heeding—believing). We are cleansed from the defilement of this world

by believing that Christ cleansed us from all sin on the cross. Do not even look to your interest in him as proof of your cleansing—look to *him!* Verse 4 of our text does not ask the congregation if they *feel* that this is true, or to look to *their faith* that it is true. The priest comes in, sprinkles the blood and by doing so declares they are cleansed.

C.H. Macintosh wrote about this in his “*Notes on the Pentateuch.*” I will end with his remarks. “If the blood has been perfectly presented to God, if he has accepted it, if he has glorified himself in the putting away of sin, then what remains for the divinely exercised conscience but to find perfect repose in that which has met all the claims of God, harmonized his attributes, and laid the foundations of that marvelous platform whereon a sin-hating God and a poor sin-destroyed sinner can meet? Why introduce the question of my interest in the blood of Christ, as though that work were not complete without aught of mine, call it what you will—my interest, my feelings, my experience, my appreciation, my appropriation, my anything? Why not rest in Christ alone? This would be really having an interest in Him. But the very moment the heart gets occupied with the question of my own interest, the moment the eye is withdrawn from that divine object which the Word of God and the Holy Ghost present, then spiritual darkness and perplexity must ensue, and the soul, instead of rejoicing in the perfection of the work of Christ, is tormented by looking at its own poor, imperfect feelings!”



THE RED HEIFER – PART 2

Numbers 19:5-10

5, And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:

6, And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.

7, Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even.

8, And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even.

9, And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.

10, And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.

As we observed in the last lesson, the Red Heifer was a wilderness sacrifice specifically representing the sacrifice for the church in the world to be cleansed from the defilement of living in an evil world. We saw that this was not a sacrifice that put away sin, propitiated God or dealt with the satisfying of the law. This sacrifice was not included in the law given on Sinai because those laws pictured and typified the work of Christ

accomplished on Calvary for the redemption of his people. This sacrifice in the wilderness was about remembering what Christ had done.

The fact that he had done it was the means by which we are cleansed from the defilement of the world. The slaying of the Red Heifer was for a people who had been made perfect by the blood of Christ but were still in the world and affected by it. The killing of the Red Heifer signifies that we *are* cleansed by the blood of Christ because we *were* cleansed by the blood of Christ. Our cleansing is not based on anything we do, any ritual we perform, any reformation we accomplish, nor even by looking to whether we have an interest in it, but simply that the blood of Christ was shed once and never again. The pouring out of his crimson tide 2000 years ago cleansed and cleanses us from all sin. This wilderness sacrifice is a gracious reminder of where we are to go when we are defiled and to what we are to apply for cleansing. We apply to the absolute truth that we *have been* cleansed. This is declared most precisely in the verses that follow.

Beginning with verse 5 in this text and going through verse 10, we are allowed to view this sacrifice being burned and completely consumed until there is nothing left but ashes.

The first thing we see in verse five is that Eleazar does not burn the sacrifice. Just as the killing of the sacrifice did not belong to the earthly priesthood, the finishing of the work, the consuming of the sacrifice does not belong to Aaron either. This is God's work, the work of the triune Godhead. There is no place for human hands to intrude in these matters. Having said that, we must not forget that the death of Christ is also a crime of which we are guilty (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:27:28 then 3:16), but we apply to the place where we are guilty to be relieved from the guilt; the blood we shed was the blood that acquitted us of shedding it.

So here we are in the wilderness of this world, touching and being touched by it, clean every whit and defiled by contact with the world. The teaching of the Red Heifer is the teaching of the double aspect of the work

of Christ. He did something for us; he did something in us— and that which he did in us did something to us. We did not do any of it, but as a result of Christ satisfying God for our sin, he also separated us from this world. He did not cause us to choose the monastic life, or to be a hermit. He separated us from the world by his death on the cross. This wilderness sacrifice was without the camp, outside the religion of the law, and there we are separated from the world (v.9 “water of separation”).

The greatest defilement of this world is not the threat of the believer going into heinous social evil, committing adultery, or becoming a drunkard. The world from which the death of Christ separated us is the defilement of self-righteousness, the dust of defilement, the ease with which we embrace the works of our flesh and the will of our heart as if they had merit before God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. What is the theology of these respective religions? Personal merit). We see this two-fold application of the death of Christ throughout the New Testament (Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:13-14; Gal. 6:14).

This is first displayed in the death of the Red Heifer, then in the burning of the Red Heifer along with some other things. In verse 6 the word declares that one shall burn the sacrifice, all of it, and shall burn it with cedar-wood, hyssop and scarlet. The cedar-wood and hyssop represent the extremes of nature, the glory of the world from the highest to the lowest element and all things in between—here pictured by the greatest and the least of plants (1 Kings 4:33). The scarlet represents the glory of man, the glory of the flesh, the splendid religion of man's sin (Isaiah 1:18—What was their sin? v. 10-15). The glory of the world and the glory of man are wrapped up in Christ and were crucified to us and us to them. How do we know? There are the ashes! What is the ground of our salvation, our deliverance from the guilt and consequence of sin? It is the cross of Chris! What is the ground of our separation from this world, our cleansing from its defilement? It is the cross of Christ! The work of Christ

has dislodged the believer from the world and made him a stranger here below, a pilgrim in this world, a wanderer and nomad whose home is elsewhere—a land of promise. This separation is accomplished by Christ and his work for us and worked in us by the Holy Spirit of God.

In verses 7-10 three characters are mentioned and all three represent the believer. There is the priest, the one who is responsible for the death of Christ and a clean person. Both of these are one person set forth in the following ways.

The believer is a priest, he is guilty of the death of Christ, and he is clean. The one thing these three have in common is they all handle the ashes of the burnt sacrifice, and each of them are made unclean by handling the ashes. Is this not the only true way to see our sin, to recognize it for what it is—to handle the ashes of the sacrifice and recall the death of Christ? We don't see sin by looking at sin, except we see that sin as imputed and punished in our substitute. This is what happens when we handle the ashes (1 John 1). What a wonderful picture this is of the work of the Spirit of God in applying the truth of the work of Christ to our hearts! When he convinces and convicts us, on what basis does he do it? Look at John 16:8-11. No matter what the world's effect or defilement on us may be called, its mother is unbelief. Its remedy is belief in Christ, the accomplisher of salvation, the judge of the evil one and his world. The gospel declares that my sin, the world and the glory of man is crucified with Christ. It also declares that I am separated from it and cleansed from its contact by the crucifixion of Christ. It's done—believe!

DEFILEMENT BY DEATH

Numbers 19:11-22

11, he that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.

12, he shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean.

13, Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.

14, This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days.

15, And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean.

16, And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

17, And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:

18, And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave:

19, And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even.

20, But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.

21, And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even.

22, And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.

As we finish our study of the Red Heifer, we will see the manner in which our Lord defines the defilement that we contract living in the wilderness of the world. With the use of the term “separation” we saw that the Lord taught us that the most prominent defilement we face in this world is the mixture of the truth with error, the unequal yoke with unbelievers, and the temple of God with the temple of Satan. This does not discount that we are also defiled in immoral activity and all manner of sin contracted by us because we cease to fix our heart and mind upon Christ. Our Lord defines the contracting of defilement as touching a dead thing or a dead body (vv. 11-22). He describes the cleansing of this defilement as the sprinkling of the waters of separation in which are the ashes of the Red heifer.

Before we look at the teaching that is before us in this passage, one thing ought to catch our attention. Before our Lord speaks of the purpose of the Red Heifer and the waters of purification which is mixed with the ashes of the burnt heifer, and even before he speaks of the defilement which is cleansed by the sprinkling of the separation potion, he declares

the sacrifice is to be made and what is to be done with the ashes. The sacrifice was designated, put in place, accepted and prepared before any defilement was mentioned. Neither the sinner nor the priest put their hands on the head of the sacrifice. So, there is no issue of transference involved, whether the acceptance of the burnt offering to the sinner or the transference of the believer's transgression to the sin offering.

The sacrifice of this Red Heifer does not have to do with the imputation of our sin to Christ or his righteousness imputed to us. This is not about the punishment of sin. That was accomplished in type with the Paschal Lamb in Egypt and the manifold repeating of the burnt offerings and other ceremonies given on Sinai and fulfilled on Calvary. This sacrifice is not about the putting away of sin before God, it is about the cleansing of the believing sinner from the defilement contracted by living in this world of sin. This sacrifice is *only* for those who have been redeemed, regenerated, made righteous and delivered from the bondage of the darkness of the Egyptian night by the person and work of the blessed savior. Now the sweet beauty of this sacrifice and its attendant preparation is that before any word of defilement was ever mentioned, the means of cleansing from that defilement was already established and in place.

The uniqueness of the sacrifice is the cleansing that it does is accomplished not by the sacrifice, but the ashes of it mixed with water and applied to the defiled one. What we are dealing with here is a reminder, a recollection of a sacrifice that affords us cleansing from defilement. What are ashes but evidence that the sacrifice was consumed and accepted by God! What is water but a way to make sure that the ashes stick to the flesh when they are sprinkled. Their mixture is the means of applying the evidence of the accepted sacrifice to the believer.

Another thing to notice is that while we were reading the report of what God says is the defilement (touching a dead thing), there is a word that was absent from the text and context. Concerning the fact of the

defilement, the word “if” is not found in the equation. Instead, there are phrases such as “when,” “whosoever,” and “he that.” All these assure us that there is no possibility of not contracting defilement while living in the wilderness of this world. We should endeavor with all that is in us to avoid contact with that which will defile us. We must make moral judgment on every occasion of the flesh, but none of these will prevent us from the defilement of the world.

Since we live here, we are going to get dirty and will need to be cleansed. How perfectly this is declared in the context as those who in obedience to God, in the administering of the waters of separation, the priests, the clean and the unclean are all said to be unclean either until the sun goes down, or for seven days or until the waters of separation are applied. Both the applier and the applicant are unclean. The handler of the sacrifice which is without spot or blemish must wash himself and is unclean until the sun goes down (v. 7, 8, 10, 21-22). The principle being declared is very clear. First, believers do nothing without sin. Even in matters of handling the things of God, in efforts to help, in deeds of kindness, in the kindest thing, and even in the declaration of the gospel we are unclean and will be so until the sun goes down on time and a new world ensues.

In all these matters the defilement comes from within us (Romans 7; Mark 7). But there is also defilement from without. It is described here as *touching a dead thing*. We know that these dead things, these dead bodies are symbolic. They symbolize that which is dead to the believer and to which the believer is dead. The chiefest among these is the law. The believer is dead to the law and the law is dead to him according to Romans 7:4-6. For the believer to go to the law, to touch the law for righteousness, for a rule of life or for a guide through the wilderness is to be defiled by touching the dead. This “law touching” is also called the rudiments of the world in Colossians 2 and is summed up by the phrase “touch not, taste

not, handle not” which is the extent of legal regulation used to glory in the flesh. This is the dead thing that defiles us.

Also, according to Hebrew 6 and Hebrews 9, that which is dead to the believer is the works of his flesh for a righteous standing before God. To touch your works as a means of merit before God is to touch a dead thing and thereby contract the defilement of the world. Colossians 3 declares that the believer is dead, and his life is hid with Christ in God. To look to ourselves for anything before God in this world is touching the dead thing and thereby contracting the defilement of the world. Since the means for cleansing us is already present, the fact that we touch these things is evident as well. We are all legalist in recovery. One sip of the forensic froth of the legal libation is too much and a thousand is not enough. We are defiled one and all.

The cleansing is set forth as a chronological process (v.19). The defiled one is sprinkled on the third and the seventh day and then purifies and washes himself, and when the sun goes down, he is clean. Remembering that types never tell the whole story and that they must be considered in the context; several things are here for us. First, this matter of sprinkling on the third and the seventh day reveals the work of the Holy Spirit in the conviction of sin and the application of the remedy. In John 16:8-11 we get a sense of the process. First the person is reminded of the defilement and the source of it. Then as the defilement is revealed, within the reminder is the declaration of the remedy.

This, in short, is the gospel being applied to the heart of the believer. In every case, the gospel reminds of our sin and our defilement by taking our mind to Christ on Calvary, reminding us that our sins put him there, and we are also reminded that him being there is the securing of our redemption by the putting away of our sin. This is the meaning of the chronology of the third and the seventh day.

This also declares that the person who is not sprinkled on the third day will not be sprinkled on the seventh day. If you hear the gospel and are not reminded of your sin, you will not be reminded of the remedy. The gospel applied is applied to sinners saved by grace.

This also teaches that the sprinkling of the water and ashes mixture is not the purifying. It is symbolic of the preaching and hearing of the gospel by the believer, the reminding the believer of what Christ has done, that he is clean every whit, that God has accepted him in Christ and made him to be the very righteousness of God. What then is the purifying, the washing etc.? (See; 2 John 3:1-3; Romans 6:7-11).

If then this sacrifice is not about the initial removal of sin in the redemption of our souls, what is this defilement truly about? It is about our fellowship with God. Though nothing we do or come in contact with effects God's relationship with us, the defilement of this world affects our relationship with him. He never changes toward us. In fact, he has already graciously set in place that which will restore us to a good relationship with him before we ever touch the unclean thing. As we are defiled in this world and our minds are drawn from him and our eyes begin to look at law, and works and self, what is it that will restore us? Just this, ashes mixed with water and applied to us.

The ashes are a reminder that there is evidence of an accepted sacrifice. The water is the means by which they are applied to us. It is the gospel, by which we are cleansed from the defilement of this world and returned to fellowship with God our father (Psalm 119:9; Eph 5:25-26; 2 John 1:5-7). Am I out of the way? Am I growing critical and legal? Am I looking to self? What shall you do for me? Take the water (the word), and sprinkle me with the ashes of the heifer, the evidence that Christ has put away my sin and made me accepted in God's presence. This will remind me of where I was, what I am in Christ and how I have become defiled, and I will be cleansed from the defilement and restored to fellowship with

him who has accomplished it all for me. This is the teaching of the sacrifice of the Red Heifer and the attendant ceremonies. It is no more, no less, and nothing else but the continual, abiding declaration of the gospel.



THE PROPHETESS DIES

Numbers 20:1

1, Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

Chapter 20 is the great record of Moses smiting the rock twice and sets before us the glorious doctrine of substitution wherein our Lord fully redeemed his people by his blood and accomplished their salvation by himself with the single offering of his own blood. Being stricken once by the law, or rather the God of law and justice, and fully satisfying the law's every demand, Christ, the rock of our salvation, will be stricken no more. We will spend some time there in the lessons to come, but for tonight, I want to call your attention to the death of the prophetess Miriam who was the older sister of Moses and Aaron.

There are eleven women who are called prophetesses or call themselves prophetesses in the word of God. Of the eleven there are four true prophetesses (Miriam [Ex. 15:20], Deborah [Judges 4&5], Huldah [2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22] and Anna [Luke 2:36]). One is a false prophetess (Noadiah [Ne 6:14]). One is a prophet's wife and bears the title but not the gift of prophetess (Isaiah's wife [Isaiah 8:3]). One is a Jezebel who claims to be but is not a prophetess who wreaks havoc in the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2;20).

Miriam is the first mentioned and the subject of our text tonight, but before we look at this remarkable woman Miriam, I want us to consider the other three true prophetesses.

In Judges chapter 4 & 5 we read of Deborah who was judge over Israel and a prophetess. Her prophecy was of the destruction of Sisera who was the captain of the army of Jabin. Jabin was the king of Canaan who oppressed Israel for 20 years after the death of Ehud. God raised up Deborah in the stead of Ehud. She prophesied that Barak would win the day in the battle with Sisera, but Sisera would not fall at Barak's hand but at the hand of a woman. Deborah and Barak, with ten thousand troops, went against Sisera and the Lord discomfited Sisera and delivered his army into the hands of Barak and Deborah. Sisera however jumped ship, or rather jumped chariot, and ran for his life. In his flight he came upon the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.

The Kenites were at peace with Jabin the king of Canaan, so Sisera felt secure when Jael invited him in for a glass of warm milk. Being worn out from running, Sisera accepted Jael's invitation to take a nap. He lay down on the floor, she tucked him in with a blanket, and while he slept, she took a tent stake and drove it through his temples securing his dead head to the floor. She then went out, found Barak and told him that she knew where the man he was looking for was. The report of this brave act by Jael eventuated in the overthrow of Jabin and Israel was at peace. We find that not only was Deborah a judge, a military tactician, and a prophetess, she was also a poet possessive of dry wit and linguistic skill. Deborah honors Jael for her work for the cause of Israel in Judges 5:24-31.

24, Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

25, He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

26, She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

27, At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

28, The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

29, Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

30, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

31, So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

In 2 Chronicles 34:22 we read of the prophetess Huldah. She played a vital role in the re-institution of the greatest Passover in the history of Israel under the reign of the great young King Josiah. At 8 years of age, he took the throne. At 16, he began to seek after the God of his father David. At 20, he began to destroy all the false alters, false teachers and false prophets. He tore down their idols, ground them to powder and scattered the dust upon the graves of those who had worshipped Baal. He burned the bones of the false prophets on their false altars. When he was 26, he began to repair the temple which was in disrepair because of neglect.

In the process of repairing the temple, Hilkiah the priest found a book written by Moses, a torah or book of law. Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan the scribe who in turn read the book to Josiah. When Josiah heard the words of the book, he knew that Israel was doomed for their idolatry and there was no hope. He wept, rent his clothes and sent for Huldah to tell him what the words of the book prophesied. She told Josiah that his fears were well founded and that Israel was in for some sad and hard times. But she prophesied that he would be spared from seeing them go into captivity. God would take him to glory before he sent Israel into captivity (2 Chr. 23-28). Her words resulted in a great, but brief, revival in the land (2 Chr. 35:18-19). In the last part of Chapter 35, the prophecy was done, and before Israel fell to Necho the king of Egypt, Josiah was gathered to his fathers (2 Chr. 35:21-27). His epitaph is found in 2 Kings 23:24-25.

In Luke 2:36, we are privileged to hear of the last true prophetess whose words are recorded in the word of God. (Phillip the Evangelist had four daughters who were virgins and who prophesied, but none of their words were recorded for us [Acts 21:9].) This last prophetess' name was Anna which means "grace." She was the daughter of Phanuel, the word that Jacob used for the brook Jabbok. At Jabbok, after having wrestled with Christ, he said, "Penuel" or "I have seen the face of God." Jabbok, Anna's father's name, means "face of God." Anna was of the tribe of Asher which means "blessed," and the prophecy concerning Asher was that "his bread shall be fat and he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen. 49:20). She was married for seven years and had been a widow for *eighty-four* years.

This sweet "grace" whose father was "the face of God," whose "bread was plenteous" and who gave out "royal dainties," prophesied a single message that revealed the "face of God." The message of "grace" was that of the plenteous bread of heaven that if a man ate, he would *never* be

hungry again. “Grace’s” message of royal dainties, delights from the king’s house, a feast of fat things and wine on the lees and well refined.

Listen to the report of this grand lady “grace,” who was probably over a century old. After seeing Simeon lift up Christ and say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,” it says of Anna, “And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” Looking for redemption in Israel? Don’t look to the law and the ceremony, look at the Christ. She “spake of *him* to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Now let's consider Miriam, the first prophetess mentioned in the word of God. Miriam, in Numbers 12, believing that God ought to be using her instead of the Cushite woman that Moses was married to, presumed that salvation was for good people. She was smitten with leprosy, but her affliction was of the most gracious sort for she was smitten with full blown leprosy and was thus as white as snow. She could be pronounced clean by the priest and though her sins were as scarlet they were made as white as snow.

Miriam was a prophetess and a child of God, and though she felt the sting of the rod of affliction for a moment, God did not allow his faithfulness to fail, nor allow his loving kindness to be taken from her. She was a prophetess, and as such, she spoke words from God. We see her heart and read her words in Exodus 15. After hearing the song of Moses wherein the Lord was glorified for the deliverance of Israel and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army (vv. 18-19), Miriam got out her tambourine, and she and the women of Israel began to dance. “We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit and *rejoice* in Christ Jesus.” Miriam was a prophetess and her prophecy was the proclamation of the glory of God in the salvation of the elect— “*Sing* ye to the LORD, for he

hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”

Miriam, the prophetess of God died (Num. 20:1 our text). She left the wilderness and went home. “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

“Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.”

TWICE SMITTEN

Numbers 20:2-13

2, And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

3, And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!

4, And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

5, And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.

6, And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

7, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

8, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

9, And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

10, And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

11, And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

12, And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

13, This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

This is the record of Moses smiting the rock twice, the result of which disallowed Moses leading the people into the promised land. Also because of this, Aaron was stripped of his high priest's office and his robes put on his son Eleazar, and Aaron was put to death by the Lord in the top of Mt. Hor (v. 23-29). By this one act, the men who were the principle players in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt were kept from not only leading the people into the land of promise but were themselves prevented from entering, both being slain by the Lord. The significance of this passage in the understating of the gospel is paramount. Something great and wonderful transpired here.

There are several things in this passage of which we can be absolutely sure.

First, it is about Christ. This rock, according to the New Testament, was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Now, the rock itself was not our Lord but typified Him. However, this picture and type gains great weight because no other type is cast in such a light. Many lambs were slain, and our Lord is referred to as the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), the Lamb of God (John

1:29) and the Lamb as it had been slain (Rev. 5:6). But never was it said of any *single* lamb that “*that* lamb was Christ.” No such language is applied to altars, tabernacles, or even the temple though all were types of Christ. This emphatic terminology was used only in reference to this Rock, the Rock which when smitten gushes forth with life giving waters (picturing substitution).

The second thing of which we may be absolutely sure is that law and justice are present, and present in reference to the smiting or the death of Christ. Moses is the *law*; his rod is *justice*.

The third thing sure is that the legal, ceremonial, Sinai high priesthood is present representing the failures of the Old Covenant in both understanding and obedience to the command of God.

The fourth thing absolutely sure is that God will be sanctified, honored by the law, justice, and the priesthood in the salvation of sinners. Each one will be used exactly as they are ordained to be used, will fulfill their purpose and will be set aside. In type, this is the picture of the law being set aside and the earthly temporal priesthood being changed and replaced by the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:11-14).

As was and is the norm for sinners, we find the people once again murmuring against God and attacking Moses and Aaron; this time because they were thirsty. Again, they decry the wilderness and paint bondage with a broad and generous brush saying that, “back in bondage there were delicacies to eat and water aplenty” (v.5). They also now are referring even to Koran, Dathan, and Abiram as fortunate to have been swallowed up by the earth and the 14,000 that died of the plague had it better than they (v. 3). The madness of unbelief is that bondage is preferred to freedom, hell is preferred to discomfort, and death is preferred to suffering (Proverbs 8:36)!

Moses and Aaron are told to take the rod that was before the Lord, to go before the people and speak to the rock, and it would bring forth water.

There is some indication that the rod before the Lord was Aaron's rod that budded, flourished bloomed and brought forth fruit. Those who hold this view say this would fit better with the concept of *speaking* to the rock, since the budding rod represents the priesthood of the church and as such, are told to "Ask and it shall be given unto you." Those who hold this view say also that this rod (Aaron's) was *not* used to smite the rock but the rod of Moses with which he smote the river turning it to blood and when he smote the rock and it gave forth water (Ex. 7:19-20; 17:5-6).

They distinguish between the two rods by the definite article "the" in verses 8 and 9 and the personal pronoun "his" in verse 11. This would account for and exacerbate the disobedience of Moses and Aaron in their respective capacities. Aaron did not speak to the rock and stood by as Moses smote the rock twice, typifying the believer applying to the law for receiving the gift of God. Moses did not *speak* to the rock but smote it twice typifying that all law is used unlawfully when men do not declare that it has been satisfied by Christ but must be used continually to sanctify both God and men.

As far as I can see, accounting for whether there were two rods, or just one, is not necessary to the disobedience of Moses and Aaron. What Moses did, Aaron standing with him, was to disobey God in doing other than what God had commanded.

The crime, however, is seen in the action itself and revealed the heart of disobedience. When Moses smote that rock twice, he was striking it the second time and the third. He smote it first in Exodus 17, and it had brought forth water which signified the efficacy of the death of Christ. Christ's death was efficacious in taking the stroke of justice for the sin of his people and in the pouring forth of grace for the salvation of their souls. Christ's death satisfied justice completely and completely redeemed his people.

This being so, there was never any need to repeat this one, all glorious, act. This is the clear and wonderful declaration of the gospel (Hebrews 1:3; 10:9-18; Gal. 6:14). The law was honored in the death of Christ, fully—eternally—and was then set aside. The believer honors the law and establishes its worth and dignity by believing that Christ satisfied it and never applying to it for salvation, righteousness or sanctification—never (Romans 3:31)! For Moses to smite the rock the second time was to say that Christ must be crucified anew because before God, before the Law, before Justice, the redeemed elect were still sinners and the death of Christ had not paid their debt. Christ died once and once was enough (1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:12,26)!

Moses' action also revealed some things about the Law itself.

First, the law's purpose was never to bring forth the grace of God. “Must we fetch” (v. 10) was what Moses said. The fact is that the law cannot fetch the blessing of God. The law has neither grace nor mercy, nor can it produce it. It was never designed to do that. Those who apply to the law to get the blessing of God will find no blessing. They will find only that they are disobedient.

Secondly, the law can only accuse and condemn (v. 10). It can never do otherwise. That is why Paul so vehemently opposed even the slightest hint of legalism in Galatia, and in Colossi Paul asked, “ye who would be under the law, do you not hear what the law sayeth” (Look at Romans 3:19). If the law encourages you, then you are dead to grace. If grace encourages then you are dead to the law.

Thirdly, the law can do nothing but smite. There is no balm for healing in it; there is no eye salve for sight in it. When it is through with you, there will be nothing but stripes. Didn't the law bring us to Christ? No! It held us in jail until Christ came and unlocked the cell door of our death row chamber and set us free (Gal. 3:21-25). When Moses spoke, it

was not to the rock but to the *people*. The law will not speak to Christ for grace; The law only speaks to people for condemnation.

Moses and Aaron will not take the people to the promised land. The law and the temporal, earthly priesthood cannot. Both will die outside the land. This is a very important lesson on two levels. First, the law and legal priesthood is not in the promised land. Secondly if you wish to apply to either, you must leave grace to do so. You must leave the promised land and go back into the wilderness looking for dead carcasses or hidden graves.

Finally, this episode that teaches us the efficacy of the death of Christ also shows that God will be honored; he will get honor by all things. The legalist who crucifies Christ afresh in their mind by teaching the law, using the law as the proverbial blunt instrument to bludgeon folks into obedience by guilt, will not prevent the promise of grace from being fulfilled. Though Moses and Aaron were disobedient, the water still came forth (John 6:35-37).

The last phrase of verse 13 says “he was sanctified in them.” Some say this means that God was sanctified in Moses and Aaron, and others say that God was sanctified in the waters gushing forth. Both are true. One, Moses and Aaron did not sanctify the Lord, because they did not believe God. But he was sanctified in them by setting them aside and justly putting them to death. He was also sanctified in the waters because even when men do not believe, even when he must chastise them, the gushing waters of refreshing grace never cease to flow in slaking the thirst of his people. (Ps. 89:29-34; 2 Tim. 2.13; Jn. 1:14-17).

“And it shall be in that day, that *living waters* shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land *springs* of water. They shall

not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the *springs* of water shall he guide them.”

SERPENTS

Numbers 21:4-9

4, And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

5, And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

6, And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

7, Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

8, And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9, And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

In our last study, we looked at an overview of this passage to see that it is all about Christ and his accomplished work of substitution for the glory of God in the salvation of the elect. We saw that Christ is the bread, the water, the Brazen Serpent and the point of the complaint of this murmuring people. Ultimately and finally, we saw the deliverance and

salvation of the people bitten by the serpents and who in fear and dread of their deserved condition, looked to Christ.

In this study, I want to begin a three part look at one specific character in the drama of salvation—the serpent. The first part of this study will concern the serpent as a picture and type of Satan and also a picture and type of religious humanity. Next study we will look at the serpent as a picture and type of sin and also the picture and type of the substitute for sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. Third and last, we will look at the serpent as an idol of false religion and the response of true faith to idols.

It is important to remember, as we look at these things, that this all came about because of men and women being dissatisfied with Christ. The heart of unbelief, whether it is manifest in Satan or in a human being, is dissatisfaction with God, and the way in which he runs his universe. The first being to bring this to the attention of mankind and play upon his dissatisfaction and rebellion was the serpent in Genesis Chapter 3. The man and woman that God made and put in Eden were two happy people (Gen. 2:21-25). However, they were mutable, changeable or reactive to change. The nature of mutability is that the mutable creature can become easily dissatisfied and thus desire change. Since the fall of Adam, this has been the driving force of humanity, the birth mother of free enterprise, capitalism, freewillism and democracy. On a human level, mutability is often commendable. We are glad to see criminals change into good citizens, drunks practice sobriety and dictatorships change to democracies.

On a human level we believe in rehabilitation. In the spirit of man, that which drives and motivates him, mutability always leads to destruction because by design a mutable creature can never be satisfied with what he has. Thus the serpent (Revelation 20:2), a mutable creature who had experienced this dissatisfaction in desiring more for himself than God had given him (Isaiah 14:12-15), now comes subtly to Eve and tempts her where he knows she is vulnerable—*her* mutability—her desire

to have better and have more than what was rightfully hers. With words full of enticement, sounding irresistibly delicious, he convinces her ready mind that there is more to be had—there is deity to be gained—that God has short-changed her, kept back possibilities and does not want her to change because it will put his honor, glory and throne in jeopardy (Gen 3:1-6). This is the work of the serpent (2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15)—a minister of righteousness—not God's righteousness—but yours that will eventuate in your deity.

This is the work of the serpent, an angel of light, to teach your dissatisfied, malleable, mutable mind to disbelieve truth and opt for the error that makes you feel exalted. This was the deadly bite of the serpent that infected our mother and revealed the willful nature that flows from mutability. As our federal head, our father did eat of the serpent's promise and sent the fiery venom of sin coursing through the veins of all his offspring. The venom, both a necrotic toxin and a neurotoxin, caused us to be born in the world with a dying, corrupting body and a ruined and darkened mind. Something other than what God has given is the enchantment for mutable humanity.

Despising what God has provided is the manifestation of mutability. The bite of the serpent is the false gospel and its allurement of self-righteousness. The word serpent means more than a “snake.” It comes from a word that means: “to practice divination, enchantment, to divine, observe signs, learn by experience, diligently observe, practice fortune-telling, to practice divination to observe the signs or omens.” The success of false preachers is that, as sons of Satan, they are able to observe and see the things that move mutable humanity. When they bite, those who are bitten are doomed. As Adam was the natural father and federal head of all humanity and the one through whom all humanity are guilty of sin against God by imputation (Romans 5; 12, 19), Satan is the spiritual father of all men in natural religion who find their unity in refusing the truth and

despising the gift of God (John 8:39-47). The church of Satan is not the idiots in black robes, cutting the throats of goats in the woods. It is that group, that religion that openly avows there is more to be had, more to be gained than what God has given; there is another righteousness and another way to put away sin other than Christ. That group hates Christ because he is *all* that God gives, and God having given him alone is the declaration that he is indeed *all*. Satan's spiritual offspring are legalistic, freewill, fundamentalist religionists who are dissatisfied with Christ.

As a child of the dragon, the offspring, the progeny of the serpent are serpents themselves. The serpent is a picture and type of the religious sinner, the self-righteous, self-sanctified snake. When our Lord called these men children of Satan in the book of John, he was not speaking to the immoral dregs of society. He was speaking to those who zealously sought to produce and establish a righteousness by which God would be obliged to recognize and honor them with acceptance. They did not endeavor to accomplish this righteousness by illicit behavior born of an immoral life. Their sin was most *splendid, beautiful* to observe, *enchanted* to the heart of unbelief, virulently venomous and disgustingly putrid to God (Phil. 3:4-8). Being described as a serpent is a description of their depravity and their religious depravity (Isaiah 59:1-6; Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Romans 3; 10-20).

Satan is a serpent and his progeny are serpents.

THE SUBSTITUTE

Numbers 21:8-9

8, And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9, And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

We looked last at the serpent being a type of Satan and also a type of the religious sinner. In this lesson, I want us to consider the Serpent that was raised upon a pole as a type of the substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ and his substitutionary work. This being so, this picture is about *sin* because our Lord was made sin in the act of his substitution. This passage is also about *faith*, or believing, set forth as a *look* at the serpent. In the New Testament, our Lord makes reference to this wonderful incident as he speaks to a very religious sinner who is an unbeliever. He reveals to this unbelieving religionist that he does not know, believe or receive the things of the Spirit. Then our Lord proceeds to use this passage in Numbers to show that man, who came to him by night, that knowing God and knowing things that come from God have to do with regeneration, which causes a person to look to Christ.

We will first look at the brazen serpent as a type of Christ, as the substitute for wounded, infected, dying sinners, then we will go to the New Testament to see the master teacher illuminate the words of Numbers 21:8-9.

First, the serpent that Moses raised up on a pole is a type and picture of Christ the substitute, and therefore is about the gospel because substitution is the heart of the gospel. Where there is no substitution, there is no gospel!

How does this serpent picture Christ as substitute? It should be noted that this is very specific. There is no way, other than as the substitute, that a serpent, this serpent, could represent Christ. In nature, personality, purpose and attributes our Lord was just the opposite of a serpent. This representation is thus very narrow and specific. This type or picture is about *sin* and its *remedy*.

1. This making of the serpent was God's *remedy* for the sin that the people had committed. There were numerous other pictures of the remedy for sin. All the sacrifices, ordinances, feasts and holy convocations pictured the Savior slain for sinners, yet we see none of them employed here. There is no ceremony, no lamb slain, no offering heaved toward God, no high priest, and no tabernacle with the manifold elements therein. Why? It is because here, they all are represented in a singular and glorious way—the brazen serpent. This is God's remedy, supplied at God's command and deals with deliverance from sin in God's singular way received by faith in the promise of God. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

2. This serpent was made of fiery or *fired* brass. Brass signifies judgment and the particularly unique aspect of this metal in withstanding intense heat. This pictures Christ as the bearer of the fiery wrath of God. Note that the serpent, when raised up, had already been through the fire. It was complete, having been tried by fire and now was lifted up for the dying to see. This is a picture of the preaching of the finished work of Christ. In preaching, we lift up the one who was crucified, who bore God's wrath and came out on the other side of it victorious (Rev. 1:15).

3. This serpent raised up was not truly a serpent but rather the *likeness* of a serpent. This has two important applications.

First it shows Christ in his incarnation and assumption of human flesh. He was not sinful flesh, though a man. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet he was without sin (Romans 8:3; Gal. 3:13).

Secondly it reveals the reason and necessity of his substitution in that he was made in the image of that which was the deadly problem that faced his people. The serpent pictured the sin of the people and the result of that sin. Christ is here pictured as sin and its result, death (2 Cor. 5:21; John 12:27-33).

4. The serpent was to be fastened to a *pole*. Of course, the initial thought that enters our mind is that Christ was to die being fastened to the cross. The Greek word for cross is “*stauros*” and literally means “pole.” Our Lord was fastened to the cross with Roman spikes through his hands and feet. It has been said that the pole represents the preacher of the gospel as he lifts up Christ in the gospel before the people. The word used and translated “pole” is the same word found in Psalm 60:4 and in Isaiah 13:2. In those passages the word is “banner,” or “ensign,” and it refers to the rallying point of the troops. In this passage it is the thing that holds up that which the people are to look to. In all the tribes, each having its own ensign and banner of identification, there was but one banner to look at if you wanted to live that day. Rally here where the serpent is the ensign of the people (Isaiah 11:10).

5. This serpent, as *raised up* on the banner, was the focal point of this entire episode. This teaches that Christ and him crucified is the object of faith. Those who were bitten, made aware of their perilous, terminal plight, were bidden to look at the serpent raised up and be immediately and summarily healed. The dying who looked lived.

6. It was *Moses* that lifted up the serpent. Moses represents the law. Christ was lifted up on the cross to honor and glorify the law. He was also

lifted up on the cross by the law in that the law required death for sin. “The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.” Christ was also lifted up in resurrection by the law. In that having satisfied the law to the utmost degree, he no longer belonged among the dead. The law, represented by the stone which sealed the tomb of the dead, could not act as a seal any longer. The stone rolled away because the living, *the life* must come forth. The law lifted up Christ in the ascension in that, being satisfied and fulfilled, it could not keep the innocent bound to this earth. Up and away the righteous one soars on eagles wing to realms of glory taking his rightful place at the right hand of the majesty on high, and the law sings his praises and honors his perfections “seated in the heavenlies.”

Now let us go to the New Testament and hear the words of our Lord as he declares the meaning of this passage in John chapter 3.

Look at John 3:14-17.

14, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15, That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17, For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Remember as we look at these words of our Lord that he was addressing one who thought that he had faith, one who thought he had spiritual understanding but did not, and as he was yet a natural man, could not.

First, with the employment of the comparative words “as” and “even so,” our Lord plainly declares the elements of the episode in Numbers to

be the same as those in the crucifixion and consequent proclamation of Christ. This is a distinction drawn for our understanding as we see our Lord speak to this religious non-believing, non-understanding and non-receiving man (vv. 10-12). The “whosoever” who believe to their eternal salvation are those who have felt the sting of the serpent, and in a desperate, dying need, look to Christ.

Any attempt to make the word “whosoever” to have universal application is both futile and without context. The “whosoever” are those who, prior to that look for salvation, were guilty of despising the provision of God, namely Jesus Christ who is represented in Numbers by the manna, or as the God haters described, “this light bread.” The “world” then is not the world without exception but the world of bitten ones who are dying of the serpent’s bite and are aware of their doom. We know this to be so because our Lord said “as” and “even so.” What applied when Moses lifted up the serpent naturally must also apply spiritually to Christ being lifted up.

Secondly this is about faith in the person and the finished work of Christ. I say that because there is no faith in Christ where there is no faith in the work that he accomplished nor faith in the merit of that work. Paul described that faith in Romans 3:24 as “faith in his blood”

Thirdly, our Lord introduces the reason behind it all and teaches why he had Moses lift up the serpent. This aspect is not clearly seen or declared in the account recorded in Numbers. However, what is concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. Why did God cause Moses to lift up that serpent? Behind it all, “as” and “even so,” the catalyst was the *love* of God for his bitten and dying loved ones. Just as he slew beasts to cover his beloved sinful pair after their having been bitten by the serpent and left dying in the garden, just as he lifted up the serpent to deliver his loved ones bitten and dying in the wilderness, even so in love, he lifted up his Son to deliver whosoever believeth. Remembering to

whom our Lord said this, the word “believeth” covers knowing, receiving and believing. Do you hear why? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Christ died in the room and stead of his people because God so loved the world. God did not send that brazen serpent to condemn those bitten ones. That would have been redundant since they at that moment were in the throes of condemnation (v. 18) having received the sentence of death. He sent that brazen serpent to save them— “even so” (V.17). Why? Because he *so* loved.

The word “so” means “on this wise,” or “even so,” or “after this manner.” It is a word made up of a definite article combined with a feminine pronoun. Thus, this passage might well read “For God *these* loved, he sent his Son” or “Because God loved *her*, he sent his son.” Where you find Christ lifted up, you will find him there because of the love of God for his elect (Romans 5:8; Gal. 2:20; 2 John 4:10; Rev. 1:5).

Finally, salvation was in look. One man said, “We first *sinned* with a “look.” Eve “saw that the fruit was good.” Then we were *saved* in a “look.” “Look unto me and be ye saved for I am God and there is none else, a just God and a Savior.” We are kept in a “look.” “Looking unto Jesus the author and finished of our faith.” And we are consummated in a “look.” “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation”

You can only see Christ in the *gospel*, but if you see him there, if you have need of Him, if you are dying of the serpent's bite, look and live. Do not offer, do not pray through, do not come down an aisle or move as much as an eyelash—look!

Look back to numbers 21:8-9 and see the guarantee of the gospel.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

The Lord said, “look and live” and those that looked lived.



THEY LOVE SALVATION

Numbers 21:7-9

7, Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

8, And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9, And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Easton's Bible dictionary reports that almost a millennium, a thousand years, had transpired from the time of the making of the brazen serpent to the time of its destruction during the reign of Hezekiah. During his reign, "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan" (2 Kings 18:4). The brazen serpent had become an object of worship and the people were burning incense to it. In effect they were worshipping it and making petitions to it, seeking help from it. The brazen serpent had been, in the people's minds, promoted to the position of a god. It was not an exclusive god but one of a panoply of deities the people of God had incorporated along with the worship of the true God.

Why did the people do such a horrid thing? The easy answer is that they were depraved, and that would be true, but there is more to

understanding this idolatry than the doctrine of depravity. One thing is that the people had five or six generations of stories about the serpent. There is no doubt that what was a one-time act of God for the remedy of the people's sin, and the consequence of it, had over the years become a powerful fable of mystical proportions to the people. The longevity of a visible thing gives it value to people. For a thousand years this *thing* which had once been the cure for snake bite was still around and had become the stuff of legend. Parents, grandparents and great grandparents had passed away and this serpent was still there. Perhaps, to the mind of the people, it would last forever.

Hezekiah checked any such notion, if they indeed existed. He took this serpent which once symbolized the substitutionary work of Christ and ground it to powder. With wonderful command of language, Hezekiah gave the serpent a new name—Nehushtan. He looked at the people and said of the object of worship which he had just destroyed, it is a piece of brass; nothing more, nothing less and nothing else—just a piece of brass. I am sure the reactions of the people were manifold. Many felt that he had destroyed God. Others perhaps were less adamant and felt that he had destroyed a reminder of God, and an aid in worship (crosses, crucifixes, pix, spikes, steeples).

Hezekiah made a profound statement concerning the worship of God, namely that there does not exist a visible aid to the worship of God in this world. There is only the Word of God, and that is only received by faith, not by sight. It is impossible, apart from a work of saving grace, to live in this world and put no eternal or spiritual value on everything you see. Conversely, it is impossible to believe anything you can't see apart from a work of saving grace. Remember also, that under the Sinai covenant everything was visible, and though no sin was ever remitted under that system, and all things in that system were but a shadow of good things to

come, what those people knew of God and the worship that was to be made toward Him, resided exclusively in the realm of sight.

At the core of the idolatry that had become the practice of the people was the thing that makes a lost man, a natural man, an idolater. This piece of brass once was the implement of deliverance from a natural malady. To the natural man, nature is as spiritual as it gets, and deliverance from the pains and afflictions of life is, to the natural man, salvation. Any concept of God, whether true or false, has to do with salvation on some level. Natural man cannot transcend his nature and must have a deity that is visible to which he can turn in times of trouble. There is too much in the world that defies explanation and goes beyond human comprehension. Idolaters look to their god for salvation. True worshipers look to their God for salvation (2 Kings 18:33-35). Under the old covenant, the people of God, inundated with visible ceremonies and rituals, came to believe the elements used in worship could actually save them (1 Samuel 4:1-3 [it]; Deut. 32:31 [they had a rock]).

The heart motive of idolatry is loving the wrong salvation. Religion, especially any religion that travels under the umbrella of Christendom, whether fundamentalist, evangelical, papal, reformed, legalistic or any of the myriad of denominational variations, is ultimately about salvation. Everyone wants to be saved from hell, from pain, from calamity and from trouble—everyone. Those, who worship a false God do so to be saved. Those who worship a false god believe their god is able to save them (Isaiah 44:14-20; 45:20; Daniel 6:20). Now this belief can be of varying consecration and depth. In the final analysis the variation is the degree to which man sees himself as co-contributor in his own salvation and as the implementer and procurer of it. The concept of free will is declared in many ways, but all those ways end up glorifying man in his own salvation. The degree involves the extent to which their god participated in their salvation or the extent of their cooperation with their god in their

salvation. The thing to realize is that all practitioners of religion do so for salvation. People love salvation.

The destruction of the brazen serpent was a defining statement discerning between those who love salvation and those who love God's salvation. The one is true, vital and eternal; the other is just brass. The Lord distinguishes between the two with the use of the personal possessive pronoun “thy” in reference to the true salvation as opposed to the salvation attributed to idols (Psalms 9:14; 13:5; 21:5; 40:10; 85:7; 119:41; Luke 2:30 [notice language]).

Those who are yet in nature, lost and without faith, love *salvation*. Because they do not know God, which is eternal life; they must, of necessity, participate in their own salvation. Their idolatry begins with rejecting God as he is revealed in nature (Romans 1:18-23) and culminates in their rejection of the gospel which is the report and person of God's salvation (Romans 1:16-17). The longevity of their system of belief, which began with Adam in the garden, gives them assurance that it will last. Those that lived in the time of Hezekiah, and worshiped the serpent were practicing what was to them “that old-time religion.” Over a period of a thousand years, the brazen serpent had become a power symbol of salvation even though it was nothing but a piece of temporal shiny metal. These adherents could say with pride that their religion was good enough for mom and pop and it was good enough for them. They could point to their god and say, “*It will save us.*”

Their religion was real, visible, and tangible and was the source of many a saved life. None of this could be questioned, though none of it was of any *eternal* value (Matthew 7:21-23). This object was not a god at the time of its manufacture, it did not even represent Christ personally in its use, but rather was exclusively representative of the work that he performed and the reason for it. So, somewhere along the way, somebody, some group decided that this was a god, worthy of worship and possessed

of power to answer prayer. These, by affirmative vote, by personal decision and by suspending rational thought made this piece of brass to be a god. The salvation that the serpent offered was an invention of a people bent on religion and willing to give some credit to the object that they had turned into a deity. They were, as with all idolaters, worshipping their *own* power, but for religious reasons—will-worship and vain humility. They called their own depraved ingenuity a god. Since this was no god at all, the incense they offered was to their own imagination. This is idolatry—loving salvation but not God's salvation.

Hear this, “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love *thy salvation* say continually, Let God be magnified” (Psalm 40:16 and 70:4 [See Phil. 3:1-3.]) Those that love God's salvation do not honor a brass invention, they magnify God. Those who magnify man on any level, or an object on any level, do not love God's salvation. Those who love God's salvation magnify him because he is the author and finisher of salvation. They magnify him because the salvation that belongs to him did not look to them in the least degree for its accomplishment. They love God's salvation because it is about God and not about them (Psalm 115:1). They love God's salvation because it honors all of God's attributes and answers all his requirements (Justice, law, righteousness, mercy, grace, longsuffering [Romans 3:24-26]). They love God's salvation because it glorifies the Son of God in both his humanity and his deity. They love God's salvation because it magnifies God and not man, and they are glad and willing to say so.

Idolaters cannot give full glory to their idols because they, by cleverness and depraved ingenuity, have invented their gods to the exact specification of their needs. Believers give glory to where glory is due. True worship is worship of the true God. False worship is nothing but a piece of brass. True salvation magnifies God; false salvation magnifies objects and symbols and those who make them.

“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.”

BALAAM

Numbers 22:1-14

1, And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.

2, And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3, And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

4, And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

5, he sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

6, Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

7, And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

8, And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.

9, And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee?

10, And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying,

11, Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out.

12, And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

13, And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you.

14, And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.

Read also Numbers 22-24

Balaam is a character in scripture that defies human comprehension. He is an enigma, wrapped in a riddle, inside a mystery. He spoke glorious words about God (Num. 23:7-10, 19-24; 24:4-9, 24:15-25). What he said of the Lord was true and indeed God-honoring. He received words from God. He called the LORD by his proper name (Num. 22:8). He knew that what the Lord said was the way it was to be done and the way that it would be done. He refused to say anything but what the Lord had put in his mouth. He was evidently renowned for his power to do wonders. In Joshua 13:22 Balaam is referred to as a soothsayer or diviner. In our day he would be called a *conjurer* or a *fortuneteller*. He was evidently successful in his

chosen line of work (Num. 22:6). His trade was not to be allowed among the people of God according to Deuteronomy 18:10-11. He was *not* a prophet of the Lord but being a prophet of some sort and some note, he proved false. He even had a reasonable and good desire concerning his own death (Num. 23:10). His desire was real, but he never saw its fruition (Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22). He understood that those whom God had blessed could not be cursed (Romans 8:31) yet was not swayed in his course to make God a liar.

If it were not for the New Testament, we may have been fooled by this talented con man (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11).

2 Peter 2:15 speaks of a people “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

Jude 11 says of them, “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”

In the contexts of these two verses we get a view of the sin of Balaam and also the rebellious nature behind the sin.

Balaam feared God, but that fear was not the fear that is the beginning of wisdom but the slavish fear of superstition. Both the contexts of 2 Peter and of Jude are descriptions of those who despise the authority of God and speak evil of dignities (2 Peter 2:1, 10; Jude 8). Though Balaam spoke well of the sovereignty of God, he did not behave in a manner that even vaguely suggested that he believed that God was sovereign (Num. 22:8 then 12-13; then 19). The fact that Balaam having heard the LORD prohibit him from going with these men still entertained the possibility that God might have a change of mind, proved that he despised the God of heaven. Three different times in these 3 chapters, Balaam, by his actions,

revealed that there was an underlying desire in his heart that overrode the necessity of obedience to God. By having an ongoing dialog with Balak, Balaam proved that he did not love God, but he did love *something*. Where was Balaam's love? He “loved the wages of unrighteousness; ran greedily—for reward.” His love for money and the possibility of fame and honor caused him to hope that he might be able to change God. Our Lord had something to say to such, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). James wrote, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:13-15). Balaam is the definitive manifestation of this truth.

Each alliance with Balak, each repeated offering up of sacrifices was an effort to sway God from the veracity of his word. Balaam loved this present world and would endeavor, even at the loss of his soul, to possess it. Had there been any moral fiber to Balaam, the dealings with Balak would have ended when God said, “Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.” The unregenerate human heart is deceitful, and the chief victim of that deceit is the person in whom that heart resides. The love for money is the root of all evil. That is not just some motto, it is a matter of the depraved heart from which are the issues from death. God said “no” and Balaam said “maybe” (James 5:12).

Such is the nature of man. If a man wants something bad enough, even though the thing he wants is prohibited by God, he will do whatever he believes will somehow cause God to change his mind. Man will justify his behavior even to the offering up of burnt offerings (that which declares the accomplished work of Christ) to move God from his immutable

purpose. Many a man has used the fact that he preached the gospel to allay his conscience from the evil of his life (Jeremiah. 7:8-10). Knowledge of the truth is not the same as obedience to the truth. Many times, I have heard people justify their evils deeds by tagging them with “I’ve prayed about this,” as if a prayer sanctions and sanctifies an illicit desire of a depraved mind. Do not pray to have what God forbids you to have, you will not get it, or worse, he may allow you to have it and then destroy your soul (Ps. 106:15). Balaam will stand in time as the primary example of the fact that God does not change, will not change,^{1st} and no amount of smoke and mirrors, no variation of angles of approach, no collective bombardment of heaven with spurious solicitations will eventuate in him moving one iota (Micah 6:5).

As vile as was Balaam's behavior, as wicked as the desires of his heart for wealth and fame, as numerous as his efforts to persuade God not to be God, the greatest evil that he did was introducing Israel to the enticement of the worship of Baal-Peor. Numbers 31:16 says, “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of *Peor*, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.” Revelation 2:14 reads, “But 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.” Baal-Peor was a Moabitish god whose adherents enjoyed and fed the impulses of the flesh. They ate the food of the false gods and practiced fornication as a rite of worship. It was a feel-good religion, and Israel bought into it with fervent and reckless abandon. They mixed the worship of idols with the worship of God and did so initially at the encouragement of Balaam. Soon, however, it was merely the desire of their heart to have it both ways. They practiced their new and exciting religion because they loved it (Numbers 25:3, 18; Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10).

Such a mixture is an abomination to God. It is never to be desired or practiced. All religion is a religion of works or a religion of grace, and never shall the twain meet. No matter how lovely the language of inclusion, tolerance, acceptance or ecumenism may sound and may appeal to the side of man that desires peace at any cost, God prohibits, forbids all such notions and their practices (Hosea 4:17, 7:8; 2 Cor. 10:21; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Balaam is a solemn warning to all who profess to know God and believe on Christ based on the things they know or desire about God and eternal life. Balaam knew something of the divine character of God. He grasped the reality of the future estate and desired to die the death of the righteous. He would not curse Israel, nor go against God's word by the word of his own mouth, yet he cursed Israel with false religion. He did it as a covert action hoping all along that God wouldn't see and that his actions would bring him wealth and glory. Knowledge, aspirations after righteousness, or even a desire to "go to heaven," do not make men accepted before God—it is Christ's blood and righteousness. It is believing God without any mixture of your own wiles or wills. It is despising the garment spotted with the flesh. Learn this lesson now! Gifts, talents, convictions or aspirations will not avail to the salvation of your soul. Them that come to God "must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

In "Pilgrim's Progress" Bunyan saw a byway to Hell at the very door of the celestial city. Beware of knowledge that does not affect life Godward. Though you cannot have life without knowledge, you can have knowledge without life. Many will perish from a church pew with a Bible in their hand and "*Amazing Grace*" upon their lips. Mark any motive that arises in you that would cause you to desire to circumvent the clear declaration of God for the gain of your own aims. God cannot be blind-sided, hood-winked, flim-flamed or conned with the vain religious

attempts of depraved men. He cannot be overcome with a multitude of prayers and duties. He cannot change, and any effort whether overt or covert, blatant or clandestine is just another gate that puts you on the broad road to destruction.

Remember Balaam.



SERVANTS

Numbers 22:22-35

22, And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.

23, And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

24, But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side.

25, And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.

26, And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

27, And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

28, And the LORD 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?

29, And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.

30, And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.

31, Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

32, And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me:

33, And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

34, And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

35, And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Note: This exposition was given following the exposition addressing Numbers 24:15-25, “Balaam’s Parables – 4.” It is inserted here to be displayed chronologically by text for the purpose of reference. (Publisher)

When I began to look at Balaam and his rebellion against God, I was first confronted with this episode at the beginning of his wicked deeds with Balak. This part of the story of Balaam is the portion that most people in religion know about. However, very little is found as to the meaning of this beast speaking to Balaam. To be honest with you, I was just going to

by-pass this part of the story because I could not find anything in the commentaries except an exposition of the *facts* as they were set forth in the Bible. I knew there was more to it than just the miracle of a dumb beast speaking, though that in itself is in no way insignificant. I have lived better than a half a century and have never heard a beast speak with a man's voice, so I was duly impressed. However, I could not speak about it with any sense, to my own satisfaction, until I had seen the rest of the story. As I began to look at chapter 25, this passage was still nagging at me, and I realized that over a period of more than a month one word kept coming to my mind when I pondered this incident. The word was “servant.”

In this passage we have *two servants*. Both serve their master. One is a *faithful* servant and the other is a *wicked* servant. Balaam's ass is a faithful servant of her master and Balaam is an unfaithful servant of his master.

Before we look at this in more detail, we need to look at what it is to be a servant. There are but two kinds of servants in scripture. The word most commonly used to define a servant in scripture is the word “slave.” So, there are two kinds of slaves in the word of God.

There are slaves that are unwilling, their servitude being forced upon them by having been bought or by being the spoils of war. These serve against their will but are yet bound to serve anyway. Their servitude is that of an overpowered, reigned-over slave. Examples of such slavery are the angry multitudes who crucified Christ. These willingly served their own lusts, but at the same time were unwillingly acting in the capacity of servants of the most high God (Acts 2:23; 4; 25-28). Pharaoh and Satan are both examples of unwilling servitude (Romans 9:17-18; Luke 22:31-32; Hebrews 1:14). Everything and everyone serves God. All things were made by him, for him, and to everything there is a purpose under heaven; all will prove beautiful in his time.

The other kind of slave is a bond slave. This slave served upon the basis of not being forced to serve. In other words, the bond slave was free yet voluntarily and gladly served his master out of love. This bond-slavery occurred when the slave was freed by his master but chose to remain as a servant. His servitude was a free slavery, which is a wonderfully spiritual oxymoron (Ex. 21:1-6). The redeemed of God, those purchased by the blood of Christ, are willing servants. There was a time, when under the tutoring pedagogy of the law wherein they were born servants, they were checked in their mischief by their strict schoolmaster. When, however, they were redeemed from the bondage of the law, they ceased to be servants and were declared sons (Gal. 3:22-26; 4:1-7). If then the son serves, he must of necessity be a willing servant and serving out of love for his master. The unwilling servant serves *legally*. The willing servant serves *lovingly*.

There is no doubt that Balaam's burro was a beast. She was a beast of burden. Her function was to carry the burden and wear the yoke of her master. Being designed, as she was, by the hand of God, she was well equipped for the task that was her function in life. So are the willing servants of Christ. They do not resist the yoke but gladly take it upon themselves knowing that their heavenly master will always lead them in the paths of righteousness (Matt. 11:28-30). The servant of God also has masters here on earth who, more often than not, do not care a whit for their servants. They are cruel, hard and often abuse their servants. Because they pay you, they feel they can abuse you at will and often do. The child of God, like Balaam's beast, yet serves (1 Peter 2:13-20).

Balaam was also put in the category of *beast* by God. Though he was a man, his behavior, attitude and heart revealed him to be a natural brute beast (2 Peter 2:9-16; Jude 10 -11). Balaam was an unbelieving, unredeemed beast who did what he did with a heart for fame, fortune, and filthy lucre's sake, devising means whereby God's people would mix

themselves with idols. He hated God and his service to God was *unwilling* and done out of slavish fear. Balaam's ass however was a *redeemed* beast. How do I know that? I know that because she was still alive to do her job. We read in Exodus 34:19-21:

19, All that openeth the matrix is mine; and every firstling among thy cattle, whether ox or sheep, that is male.

20, But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.

21, Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest.

There you have substitution—redemption of every firstling ass. But wait, this beast was female; so is the bride of Christ for whom the master gave his life (Eph. 5:22-32). Being a redeemed beast, she pictures the *willing servant*. The words that she spoke are the words of the willing servant (Nu. 22:30).

Now let's consider these two servants. While we do this, I want you to keep something in the back of your mind as an overriding principle in the understanding of this passage. Look at Matthew 6:24:

24, No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

With this passage (Num. 6:24) we have the introduction of a second master who appears as the “angel of the LORD.” This is a phrase often used of Christ, the “Angel” or “Messenger of the covenant.” Particularly,

this represents Christ in providence as revealed in his word because he stands in the path of Balaam as an adversary with a sword in his hand. Think, if you will, of the times in your sojourn when you were headed in a particular direction and the angel of the LORD stepped in your path and blocked your progress with his word. Perhaps even the master you serve here, your governor, your boss, your husband, parent or a friend, has put before you an opportunity that requires that you contemplate and perhaps even consider compromising what you know to be right. Remember how the word of God slammed into your mind, reaching in to squeeze your heart. Perhaps the lure of gain without godliness was set before you, or the narcotic of position and its attendant glory complete with its endless supply of sycophants allured you. Then suddenly the two-edged sword of the LORD pierced through to the marrow and discerned the thoughts and intents of your heart. Perhaps the enticement was so great that you succumbed and then was brought to the bitter tears of repentance. Providence always calls and is often an adversary to our ambitions. When God forbids, then it is forbidden.

How does the wicked servant respond to providential roadblocks? Quite simply, the unwilling servant, the unbelieving servant will seek a way around it. Balaam, whose name means “not of the people” is a man whose reaction to providence defines what it is to skirt the issue, to avoid the truth and to take evasive action. It must be remembered that Balaam had a *goal* in mind. Though prohibited by the LORD from cursing the people and giving assent to the fact that they could not be cursed, he nonetheless sought a way to *curse* them. The unwilling servant refused to be checked in his independent course to have the desire of his heart. Balaam was turned aside, and he turned back; he was crushed against a wall and he pressed on; he was shut up with nowhere to go, but he continued to claw his way forward. Even when he saw that it was the Lord

in his path, and heard the Lord tell him that he was about to be killed, his response is that of a man possessed.

Look at verse 33 and 34 and think for a moment. This infidel is told that his donkey saved his life and that to continue on his course will end in his death. In short, he was forbidden to go, stopped in his career, halted in his path to destruction, and still he does not believe. He even confesses his error saying, "I have sinned" and "I didn't know that it was you who was restraining me." Oh, but look at the unbelief in that last remark. "*If* it displease thee." *If? If?* Oh, how well the scripture warns of the deceitfulness of riches choking the word and to beware lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. "*If*," Balaam says, "*if* it displease thee," and all the while he bears the bruises of providential displeasure. Our Lord said to the Pharisees, "Because I tell you the truth, you believe me not." Balaam wanted what *he* wanted, and with his words, called God a liar. "I know you prohibit it but maybe you really do not prohibit it. Maybe there is a way around it. If it feels so right, how can it be wrong?" So, the Lord let him have his way and sent leanness to his soul and finally destroyed him.

The way of the transgressor is hard. A man cannot serve two masters. Balaam chose mammon and hated the Lord. The unwilling servant sees the Lord and his word as an obstacle that can be circumvented. He sees the prohibitions of the word and the roadblocks of providence as surmountable probabilities, problematic but not impossible to overcome.

How does the willing servant respond to providence? First, he sees the Lord in it when no-one else does. Providence is not chance or happenstance. Providence is the sovereign Master ordering all things for the good of his people, his servants. Oh, that our Master would fill our vision so much so that the prison would a palace make, and prohibitions would be regarded as needed and beneficial for growth and maturity. The willing servant reveres the Lord and his word and fears to displease Him.

The willing servant will obey his earthly master until his earthly master puts him in conflict with God (Acts 5:28-29). The willing servant listens to the voice of providence (Num. 22:23-27, Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-23).

Man cannot serve two masters.

BALAAM'S PARABLES – PART 1

Numbers 23:8-10

8, How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?

9, For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

10, Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

The four parables of Balaam are answers to the requests of Balak to curse whom God had blessed. There is an overriding theme in all of the wonderful words uttered by this man who, in his heart, desired the riches that Balak had offered him. The overriding principle is simply this; “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

This part of the story begins with Balak taking Balaam up to a high mountain of Baal (Num. 22:41). There is no small indication that Balak thought this would finally be a battle of the gods while at the same time realizing that his god was but a fluke and depended on the wiles of men to get the job done. He did not cry to Baal Peor to curse Israel, but realizing the ineptness of his god, he sought the chief soothsayer instead to do his bidding. Nonetheless, he saw the necessity of making his manipulation to fall within the context of his superstitious religion. It is ever the desire of false worshippers to sanction their activities by performing them in a religious context. To do an activity in the name of a god adds to their activity a sense of legitimacy. At the heart of Balak's action is also the

prevailing notion of all false religion and that which gives great yet false peace to its adherents. Religion thrives on the idea that *their* god can be manipulated, moved from his set course to follow the whims of his worshippers. Unfortunately, such find a brick wall when confronted with the immutable, unchangeable God of all glory.

So Balak and Balaam ascend to the high place where Balak hopes that Balaam can influence God. Balak does not realize his desire, because those whom God has blessed cannot be cursed. His gifts and calling are without repentance. God may, indeed will, deal with his people in loving chastisement. However, he will not allow anyone, any dog to wag his tongue against them. He tells the truth about his people but will allow no person to speak ill of them. Just as we know what our children truly are, as our parents knew who we truly are, we still allow no-one to speak ill of them. Likewise, God will allow no infidel, or even his own people to touch his anointed. When men seek to curse whom God has blessed, they find God joining the fray, standing between the accuser and his people (Matt. 18:10-11). When Balaam looked from the mountain top at the people of God, what did he see? He saw God (23:9a).

Who are these people whom Balak wishes to curse? If we are to look only at the people of God, we will not see holiness and righteousness exhibited. Those gathered at the border of Moab are the murmuring, gainsaying hordes of complainers that God has delivered out of Egypt. They are sinners all and would seem to deserve to be cursed. Our Lord said, however, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." God knows his people. He knows full well their every fault. He knows all that they are, all that they have done and all that is in them (Psalm 103:14). Our lives are open books before God.

However, he does not judge us according to ourselves but according to what he has made us to be in Christ. When God looks at his people, he sees the beauty of Christ. He beholds them as his workmanship created in

Christ Jesus. He does so to the praise and glory of his grace. One man said that God has invested so much in his people that he cannot afford to let them go, lest he lose his glory. As Balaam thinks of a way to sway God in order to gain riches, he sees God standing between him and the people whom Balak would have him curse. God's glory demands that his people should be presented in the comeliness that he has put on them. (Illus. Zech. 3:1-5; SS. 1:5-6 then 4:7; Eph. 5:25). God's people stand perfect in Christ; that is how he sees them, and that is therefore, how they are (Hebrews 10:12-17)! Some will say that such thinking will lead to sin, but it will not. The believer does not measure his standing with God by his character and conduct but measures his character and conduct by his standing with God.

The actions of Balaam further prove that religious activity, ceremony, sacrifice and such do not sway God at all. They offered up burnt offerings, gathered around them and got on a high hill to be closer to God, but it was all to no avail. Let the potsherds of earth gather together; let the demons of hell and the kings of the earth assemble; let them array themselves in religious regalia; let them get near to the burnt offering which represents the finished the work of Christ. All their demonstrations and remonstrations cannot evoke one curse against those whom God has blessed (23:8).

Having said that, Balaam proceeds to speak the first words about this nation whom Balak seeks to curse. Look at verse 9. "Lo. the people shall dwell alone." Remember that Balaam is viewing these people through the vision of God. He sees as it were, this people in God, and he sees only this people in God. Balak and his princes of darkness are not in God. The Moabites, the Amorites, nor the Perizzites are in God. These people and these alone stand alone in God. It is no small thing that the first thing that Balaam realizes is that these people *alone* are God's people. Of all the

people of the earth, this nation bears his name, his stamp of approval and his glory.

These are the elect, the chosen of God and their natural election pictures the spiritual election of true Israel, the church of the living God (Deut. 7:6-8). “Lo, these people shall dwell alone.” They, alone, shall dwell in God. They alone are saved by his grace. They alone are blessed of God with all spiritual blessings in Christ. They alone have received mercy and grace. They alone are a holy people, a righteous people, a royal people. If we were able to ascend to a high place and look at the earth and all that dwell therein, we would see God engulfing, embracing and protecting the church. “Lo, these people shall dwell alone.”

This people “shall not be reckoned among the nations” (v. 9c; Exodus 33:16). If a census, a true census, could be taken of the nations of the earth, this nation could not be numbered among them. The people of God, the elect of God, are in the world but not of the world. They are citizens of another place, a city whose builder and maker is God. They are, as we speak, “seated in the heavenlies with Christ.”— “thy daughter is a garden enclosed.” “Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?” “Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” “My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.” “No weapon formed against them shall prosper.” And no ersatz soothsayer-prophet or pagan king can utter any curse against God's elect. These blessed ones reside encapsulated, enveloped, enwrapped and fortified by divine love, grace and mercy. To curse them, there must be grounds on which to accuse, and no such ground exists where God has declared righteous (Romans 8:33). This people “shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

The next words of Balaam are said in wonder as he sees true Israel, as they are in Christ. Those camped at the borders of Moab could be numbered, but those whom they represent cannot (v. 10a; Gen. 13:16; Rev. 7:9).

Finally, Balaam, in a moment of ecstatic wonder, sees how precious this nation, this people, these elect are to God. They are precious in his sight—so much so that the death they die is a thing to be desired and envied (Psalm 116:15). Balaam wishes that he could die the death of the righteous but not live the life of the righteous. The life of the righteous is founded upon the unchanging God. Balaam, in his wicked vacillations, seeks to change God and gain filthy lucre by doing so. The tenor of the life of the righteous is contentment with God as he is. Balaam desired that God be *other* than who he is. Balaam will not die the death of the righteous because he is not righteous, and though his desire is commendable, it is nonetheless a miniscule part of his overall desire to compromise all for the gain of the world (Rev. 22:11; Matt. 16:26). Those whom God has blessed can never be cursed.



BALAAM'S PARABLES - PART 2

Numbers 23:14-26

14, And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.

15, And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the LORD yonder.

16, And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus.

17, And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken?

18, And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

19, God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

20, Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

21, he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.

22, God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.

23, Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

24, Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

25, And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.

26, But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?

In the first parable of Balaam, the word of God assured Balak that no curse would be allowed to touch Israel, that they were the only people of God upon the face of the earth (which excluded the Moabites as well as all others; [Deut.7:6-8]), that their number could not be numbered and that their end, their death and their eternal future was glorious. Balak's response was typical of false, idolatrous religion (23; 11, 13). By nature, men cannot and will not acknowledge God as he is and are therefore set on a doomed course to make him to be as they would wish him to be. So now, Balak takes Balaam to another high place in hopes of influencing God to curse Israel. This occasions the second parable found in our text, Numbers 23:14-26.

The words of this parable are a further answer to the mindset of Balak. Balak, in effect, was saying that God was not being truthful and that there had to be a way to prompt God to alter his words. Though clearly told that his efforts are futile, he still holds that something can be done to undo what God has said about his people. These words strike terror and raises ire in the hearts of all who believe that those whom God has saved can somehow be finally lost.

God's answer, the parable that he gave Balaam in reply to Balak, is the clear, succinct and wonderful proclamation of the gospel. The first words out of Balaam's mouth to Balak are almost an "I told you so" (v. 19). What God said about his people was true because God cannot lie and

will not repent. He cannot lie because he is not a man. He cannot repent because he cannot change his mind. He said certain things about Israel, and he will do it. He has spoken certain things concerning Israel, and he will make them good. Further, he has spoken to Balaam a commandment saying that he has blessed, and it cannot therefore be reversed. He will do it, and he will make it good.

What follows is a catalogue of *irreversible* blessings. These are the blessing of true Israel, the church of the living God. If you are a believer, taught of God and brought to Christ, these are your irreversible blessings. Let the naysayers, the mollifiers, and the non-wave makers of useless religion carp at will. He has blessed and none can reverse it.

Blessing number 1: God does not see iniquity or perverseness in you (v. 21). Behold, the eyes of God see no iniquity or perverseness. Why? Because in his eyes there is none. (Jeremiah 50:20; Hebrews 10:17-18). Marvel and wonder oh sinner saved by grace. God, whose eyes are too pure to behold evil, beholds you. In his eyes you have found grace, and there is no ground to do anything to you but bless, and bless, and bless the more.

Blessing number 2: God is with you. How? (See: Matthew 1:21-23). He is with you because you live and move and have your being in Him. He is with you because he is in you (Coll. 1:27). He is with you because you have always been in him (Eph. 1:3-5). He is with you because you dwell in him and he in you (John 17:22-26). He is with you because he has promised never to leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You are inscribed in the palms of his hands and written in his book of life. He is with you.

Blessing number 3: The shout of the king is among you (v. 21). Several years ago, I was preaching in a conference where one of the preachers preceding me used these words trying to, what he called, “pump some life into the old, cold, dry doctrinarians.” He tried, for a while, to get the folks worked up by saying this text meant that they should be shouting,

waving their hands, applauding and other such emotional stuff. The next morning, I addressed the error of what he said and was never again invited to preach in one of his conferences.

Remember the context in which this is spoken. God is telling Balak through Balaam that his people are secure. The grace that he has bestowed on them is “ordered in all things and sure.” One of the blessings God has given them as a source of assurance is this shout of the King. That shout of the King was made on the cross as our savior lifted up his head and cried with a loud voice, “It is finished!” “Tis done, the great transaction's done!” In the camp of true Israel, there is a shout of the King, a continuing, ongoing, never ending shout. True Israel hears it, rehearses it, repeats it, eats it, drinks it, and base their soul's confidence on it. This shout is their cover by day, their light by night and the pillow on which they rest their fevered brow. The world wishes they'd shut up about it and go on to more practical things, but they can't. Everywhere they turn, everywhere they look, everything they hear is subdued by the voice of him whose voice is as thunder, the sound of many waters. When their heart convicts them, they hear the shout. When the world accuses them, they hear the shout. When all around the world grows worse, they hear the shout. When they see dimly, their hearing is yet acute. The shout of the King is among them. The shout of the King is the *gospel*.

Blessing number 4: You have been delivered by sovereign power (v.22). Fear not, he who has engaged himself in the matter of your eternal salvation is none other the sovereign of the whole universe. “He shall not fail.” Everyone whom he has desired, he will possess—does possess. None for whom Christ died shall ever be lost. Who can turn him from his course? Who can stay his hand? Who can challenge his authority? He is God, my savior!

Blessing number 5: No one can touch you (v. 23a). Nothing can change his relationship with you. No charge can be brought against you. In

the highest court you have been declared untouchable unless He, in kind providence, allows it. Satan the arch enemy of the elect must himself crawl on his belly like a reptile to the feet of him who bruised his head and beg to receive permission from the master, else he remains helpless to move against you. And if he is given permission and moves against you, he will find that he is actually ministering to you the things of God, much to his dismay (Luke 22:31-32; Hebrews 1:12-13).

Blessing number 6: What God has done for you brings glory to him alone (v. 23b)! It shall be said of Jacob and Israel “What God hath wrought!” There, down in that valley is a bunch of murmuring, gainsaying complainers whom God sees as perfect before him. When all is said and done, when the rebels stand in glory in immaculate perfection, in purity and righteousness, there will be no talk of their goodness, their works, or their wills, but rather a glorious tribute to him who brought them to this lofty plane—What God hath wrought! There is nothing in them, of them, or about them that can attain to anything higher than a snake’s belly in a wagon rut, yet there, they are in the beauties of holiness. Behold what *God* hath wrought!

Blessing number 7: You shall prevail (v.24). Here is magnificent language. Here the church of God is seen in its vital union and complete identification with the Son of God's love. There can be no doubt that God sees his people in his blessed Son. The description that God gives of Israel is the very same description that he gave of his own Son (v. 24 compare with Genesis 49:9). You shall prevail. The church of God is militant, an army of warriors assaulting the gates of hell, and those gates will fall at the sound of the gospel (Matthew 16:16-19; Isaiah 30:17-21; Deut. 32:30-31).

Be of good courage and fear not. “He who has spoken these things is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent:

hath he not said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

BALAAM'S PARABLES - PART 3

Numbers 24:1-9

1, And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

2, And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.

3, And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

4, he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:

5, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!

6, As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

7, he shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.

8, God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows.

9, He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

In the former two parables of Balaam, a general and wonderful principle has been established by God. He views his people with the eye of grace, always. His people are the only people on the earth that he has and will bless. Nothing they do can keep him from his kindness and longsuffering toward them. He sees no iniquity in them. He views them as faultless before his throne. He guarantees their advance and success in the economy of eternity and in their life before Him. He is *for* them as he said to Jeremiah, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you. saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

In the third parable this theme continues, but with a subtle change, not in God who cannot lie and cannot repent, but in the understanding of Balaam. He is again brought up to a high place by Balak and asked to curse Israel (23:27-30). Balaam now sees the people of God with new eyes. This does not suggest that his covetous spirit and wicked intentions have changed. Verse 1 makes it clear that he has become a pragmatist and sees that the means he has employed thus far are without success and will never succeed. He sees that God is pleased to bless Israel, so he will no longer seek to curse them by means of enchantments. He will seek another way. The fact that this has been his plot up to this point in time is made clear with the phrase “he went not as at other times to seek for enchantments.”

God opened Balaam’s eyes to see Israel as God sees them (vv.3-4). This changes the dynamic of the Balaam’s view and sets forth the manner in which one whose eyes are opened is to look at the people of God. We understand that God has well saved his people. We know by the clear declaration of scripture that the sins of the elect have been put away by the

blood of Christ, and God accounts them righteous having imputed the person and work of Christ to them. We know, according to divine edict, no charge can be laid against the elect, and they are not now nor ever can be condemned. This we know by faith as God has given us to believe the account that he reports of his people. We understand this by faith. We are, however, plagued with sight, and our eyes, though capable of seeing that which is naturally before us, need to be opened to see the people as God sees them.

This is a practical lesson in how we are to look at the people of God. We are all sinners and as such we act accordingly. Most of us fear that at any moment we will be discovered for what we truly are. Likewise, we all have a tendency to judge according to what we see with natural eyes rather than the opened eyes of faith. Balaam's experience here is very beneficial to us because our view is often from a perspective that is much too *low*. We have need of mounting on eagle's wings and lighting on the highest peak of Mount Zion, and from there, and there alone, look at the habitation of the people of God. This does not suggest that we are to overlook evil or refuse to rebuke when necessary. The word of God makes it clear that the church of God is to deal with offenses in a loving manner. This passage teaches the only means by which that can be accomplished. Israel will in the very next chapter go whoring after other Gods, and God will severely chastise them for it. This does not change his view of them, but in fact reveals they are his and that his actions toward them are done in love (Pro 3:11).

If we view the people of God with disdain because of what they are in themselves, we need our eyes opened to see the truth about them. If I do not consider the people of God from the lofty apex of truth, then my eyes are closed to God and opened to my own prejudices. When God opened Balaam's eyes, what he saw was not the sin of Israel, nor the possibility of cursing them, but his eyes beheld the beauty of what God had done for

them. “We look not at the things which *are* seen, but at the things which are *not* seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Mark well this principle and pray it will govern your life. Pray God for opened eyes and a conviction to disdain any view that diminishes your brother or sister in Christ. The world would have you curse your brother.

The world will use every means at its disposal to encourage you to see your brothers and sisters with a horizontal view. Politics is a horizontal view. Race is a horizontal view. Legalism is a horizontal view. A view for filthy lucre's sake is a horizontal view. Have you anything against a brother or sister in Christ? Does anything you now embrace cause you to diminish your brother or sister in your eyes? Does anything you think or do concerning your brother or sister have as its motive more change in your purse at the expense of your brother or sister's fellowship? Have you joined the world in its view of one of your brothers or sisters? I could care less about what the world does with its stuff, but I must care preeminently for the edifying and strengthening of the children of God and seek never to diminish them on any level. How can I achieve this lofty manner of thinking? How can I see in such a way? God must open my eyes. When he does, what shall I behold when I look at my brethren? What do open eyes see?

The first thing that opened eyes see is that God is pleased to bless his people, and since he always has done what he hath pleased, his people are blessed (v. 1). I cannot do anything to change that, and any effort to do so puts me in league with all who oppose God. Even though I may offer up seven bullocks on seven altars and stand fast by them, every effort to see the sin of Gods people will meet with failure and prove that my eyes are yet shut to the glory of God's grace toward them. Look around you. See “what God hath wrought.” Stand on Zion's holy hill and view with opened eyes.

If you see with opened eyes you will see “the vision of the Almighty” (v.4). You will see this, “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!” (v.5). You will see that God is pleased to have his people to please Him. Their habitations are glorious; they dwell in the Most High. They are the children of God. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. Would you touch them to do them harm? Would you look down on them? Then you would look down on Christ and do him harm (Matthew 25:34-40; Acts 9:4; Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8). Opened eyes see that all of God's children are in a goodly estate (Psalm 84:1, 4, 10).

If you see with opened eyes, you will see that the people of God, your brothers and sisters in Christ, those who sit next to you in church, have all things ordered for their care. They are planted in pleasant places by God himself (Jer. 32:38-41; Isaiah 60:21; 61:3). They are as the lign aloe tree that was used for perfume—they are a sweet-smelling savor unto God (Ps. 45:8; Song 4:10-14).

If you see with opened eyes, you will see that all of God's graces and mercies are upon his children in abundance (7a; Eph 3:20; Titus 3:3-7). His beloved children are awash in grace, deluged with mercies and the water of life poured on them by the bucketful.

If you see with opened eyes you will see that Christ *is*, and is in every grace that is poured out upon them (7b). If you see with opened eyes you will see that the King of the people of God is the King of Kings (23:21). You will see that the end of his people is great (7c; Rev. 5:10; 20:6).

If you see with opened eyes you will see that he has delivered them from bondage by sovereign power (8a), that he will destroy all them that are against his people (8c-9a; Isa. 54:11-17).

If you see with opened eyes you will see that his people are blessed, and no one is allowed to curse them (9b).

What a lesson this is! We understand by faith that God has secured his people in everlasting love and grace. Oh, but for open eyes to look at them in that manner.

5, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!

6, As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

7, he shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.

8, God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows.

9, He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee

BALAAM'S PARABLES - PART 4

Numbers 24:15-25

15, And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

16, he hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:

17, I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold 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 destroy all the children of Sheth.

18, And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

19, Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

20, And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.

21, And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock.

22, Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.

23, And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!

24, And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever.

25, And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.

As we look at this last parable of Balaam, there are a couple of things that need to be considered.

First is the location of Israel at this time. They were near the border of Canaan. This is the last stop before they enter the promised land. This is the area where God will finish off the remainder of those who were over twenty years of age when Israel was delivered from Egypt. What follows is a categorical manifestation of the result of Balaam's wicked counsel to Balak. On the border of the promised land Israel will involve itself in every manner of evil and idolatry. The Targum of Jonathon records these words of Balaam's illicit counsels as, "Come. I will counsel thee, go and prepare victualling houses, and place lewd women there to sell food and drink at a low price, and bring this people to eat, and drink, and be drunken; and let them lie with them, and deny their God, and they will be delivered into thine hands in a little time, and many of them will fall." Though this is an uninspired account, it rings true with the things revealed about Balaam's counsel (Numbers 31:16; Rev. 2:14; 25:1-2).

The second thing to consider is that the final words of Balaam are, as the other parables, prophetic words concerning the church and its ultimate victory by Jesus Christ (v. 14). In verses 18 and 20-24, the utter destruction of the enemies of God are displayed. Their ultimate ruin is sure and without remedy (v. 23). This destruction began with the incarnation of Christ and is carried out during the age of grace, wherein the Lord set aside the Old Covenant and the church systematically through covering the earth with the gospel in assaulting the gates of Hell. The

destruction will be consummated in the glorious return of the King of Kings.

Balaam begins this parable as he began the last one. He is speaking as one who has not only heard from God but as one who has seen “the vision of God,” having been made privy to the plan of God for his blessed people (v. 16). The first words out of Balaam's mouth declare two things.

First, these words of Balaam are a confession that he has neither part nor parcel in the good end of Israel. Balaam says that he will “see God but not nigh.” What a confession this is! Here is a man who sees that God will save Israel, destroy all who oppose him and sees himself among those whom God will destroy. The language that Balaam employs is the language of one who sees God coming to judge him. He sees God, as it were, afar off, not in distance or time but in personal association and identification. He sees God, not for “himself” as Job did, but God “not nigh.” He sees himself as one of those who will *not* stand when God does what he is going to do. He will not be near God, and God will not be near him. His end will not be to die the death of the righteous; his end will be the end of the wicked (Isaiah 3:10-11).

Secondly, Balaam's words are a comfort to the enemy. Though Balak and all the other enemies' dooms are foretold with the coming of Christ, Balaam says “but not nigh.” All the religious mind needs is a delay in punishment to comfort its depraved heart (Ecc. 8:11; 2 Peter 3:2-15). Balak, in his depraved and reprobate mind, would do what such a mind can only do—its filthy deeds (Romans 1:32).

What did Balaam *see* when he saw God? What he saw was a three-fold description of the coming God, the very one who will bring victory to true Israel. He sees first a Star out of Jacob. There can be no doubt this is Christ, the bright and morning Star, the Sun arising with healing in his wings, the Day Star arising in your hearts. The first thing Balaam sees is Christ the light of the world (v. 17). He sees the beginning of the new

creation, as if the vision of God is declaring, “Let there be light” (Isaiah 60:3; Matt. 2:2). Christ is the revealer and the revelation of God. He is the knowledge and the acknowledgement of God. He is the key of knowledge. Outside of him is only darkness.

The second thing that Balaam sees is a “Scepter rise out of Israel” (v. 17). A scepter is what a king carries as symbolic of his royalty and a means by which he accepts people into his presence (Esther 5:2; 8:4). The scepter of Christ is his righteousness, the only means by which his people are accepted into the presence of God (Lev.21:21; Heb. 1:8; Eph. 1:6). He is the “Lord our Righteousness” (2 Cor. 5:21). He is Jehovah Tsidkenu, blessed Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, King of Peace.

Finally, he sees Christ as “he that shall have dominion” (v. 18). What more explicit description could be given of Christ than this? He has dominion. He is Lord of Lords (1 Cor. 15:25). His dominion is from everlasting to everlasting. He is couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? What shall be the end of those who oppose him? Their doom is sealed. There is no hope for those who oppose “him who has dominion” (Eph. 1:20-21; Psalm 2:6-12; Psalm 110:1-2; Nahum 1:6). The Sovereign Lord is our Lord. He shall not fail. He shall prevail.

Read again the text, then Revelation 19:11-16.

PERSPECTIVE

Numbers 25:1-18

1, And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

2, And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.

3, And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

4, And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.

5, And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor.

6, And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

7, And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;

8, And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

9, And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.

10, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

11, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.

12, Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace:

13, And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.

14, Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites.

15, And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.

16, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

17, Vex the Midianites, and smite them:

18, For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.

On July 22nd, 1969, I was sitting in the instrument shop of the air base in Mildenhall, England. I was having a cup of coffee and someone handed me *The Stars and Stripes*, the armed forces newspaper. The front page had an unfurled flag that covered the whole page, and emblazoned over the flag were the words "On the Moon." We were in the midst of the war in Vietnam, and it was not a pleasant time for the U.S. soldier. There was turmoil back home in the streets and on the college campuses, and we had

actually been advised to not wear our uniforms off base because of the hostility.

From the orbiter and the sea of tranquility, the astronauts were privileged to see the earth rise on the lunar horizon. Most every American has seen the picture of that beautiful blue planet, and those who remember it are yet in awe when they see it. How beautiful and peaceful it appeared. As I left the shop that morning to go to the flight line to work on a C-130, it was raining, dreary and muggy. The astronauts saw beauty and peace; the soldier saw rain and fog; the grunt in Vietnam saw death and destruction, and the protesters saw our boys dying in a foreign land. Both the astronauts and the grunts were looking at the same earth, but from a totally different perspective.

In Numbers 23 and 24, we see Israel from the heights of Pisgah, even from the lofty habitation of heaven itself. We see Israel with the “vision of God.” In chapter 25, we see Israel from the plains of Moab; same nation, different perspective. We are much like Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 who entered into the third heaven and saw things too wonderful to be put in human expression, “unlawful to be uttered.” What he saw was enough to make him declare that in the midst of affliction, God's grace was sufficient, and in another place to declare that this light affliction was insignificant when compared to the glory that awaits the saints. From heaven, he saw how well it all would end, but look at the words he spoke at the last part of the same chapter (2 Cor. 12:20-21).

20, For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

21, And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed

He, as it were, left the plains of Immanuel's land and came to the wilderness of the world. And so it is with us. We must come down from the fragrant ether of Pisgah and walk in the asphyxiating stench of the plain of Moab. We must leave the presence of Almighty God and tread the dust of the habitat of Baal-Peor.

Before we walk here, see the wickedness and taste the bitterness of succumbing to temptation, we must look with the eyes of faith to see the truth. From Pisgah we saw the standing of God's elect—not this bunch, for most of them are but future carcasses in this place. In this camp there are only two, Joshua and Caleb who will enter the promised land along with all who were under 20 years of age when delivered from Egypt. In Joshua and Caleb, the savior and the faithful dog, lay the promise of true Israel, the church of the living God. In these two are the future of the election of grace and the Israel seen in the vision from Pisgah. Thus, we are commanded to reckon the old man to have died with Christ because experience shows us that though our standing with God is sure and wonderfully complete, down here where evil lurks in every nook and cranny of our minds and hearts, we see our present estate. Are the elect righteous before God? Are their tents goodly? Has the Star risen out of Jacob for them? Has a scepter risen from Israel for them? Of course, for their salvation is of God! Yet they live in a state of sinfulness, their vision of the Most Holy darkened. They, we, are bent toward idolatry, discontent, murmuring and whoredom, and only a mighty hero can deliver us by destroying our enemy. We all deserve the judgment and wrath of God. In

Chapters 22-24 we see the *standing* of God's people; in Chapter 25 we see their *estate*.

In our text, I want us to consider 4 things. 1, the sinners; 2, the sin; 3, the Savior; and 4, the salvation.

1. The Sinner. Who are the sinners? We could well say they are the Moabites, or the Kenites, or the Amalekites or the worshippers of Baal-Peor. They all are vile and wicked offenders, given to idolatry and all that is false. There is, however, no record of any of them dying in the plague that was sent by God. The twenty-four thousand that perished before the anger of God was assuaged were called by a different name. The sinners who suffered the wrath of the angry God were called *Israel*, the *children* of Israel and the *people* (of God) (vv. 1-3). The false worshippers of the Moabitish hordes did not suffer the wrath of God, but they also did not experience the salvation of God. Though some would say of those who believe that election is of grace believe they are somehow special, there is the clear declaration of scripture that God's people are sinners *all*, and they are sinners against light. Every sin we commit is against the knowledge of our perfect standing in Christ. This people had continuously been delivered by the mercy of the covenant God, yet showed themselves to be the worst of the lot of humanity. The elect of God, the people of God are sinners. Even though they are eternally secure in God's grace while in the wilderness of this world, they are yet capable of the vilest of practices and the most wicked and sinful behavior (Romans 7:15-25; 2 Timothy 1:13, 15). Before the glorious salvation wrought by Christ is declared in Romans 3:24-26, the first 23 verses are spent declaring the utter depravity of those who were the recipients of the propitiatory work of Christ. The people of God are sinners in this world.

2. The sin. What was the sin of the people? Their sin was *whoredom*. This is a broad term, not restricted to an indictment of lascivious behavior and fornication with the “daughters of Moab” (v. 1) but all that is involved

with false worship and idolatry (vv. 2-3). We have seen that the core of the people's sin, the core of all sin and the mother of all sin, is unbelief. Unbelief is manifest in endeavoring to merit a right standing before God in a manner other than the singular means that God has provided (Acts 4:12). It is not insignificant that the people are whoring after Baal-peor (“the lord of the gap”). He is an offshoot of *Baal*, the name given Nimrod after he died. He is the same who built a tower to heaven by his own hand to be found accepted before God by the might of his own works and merit. He is the origin of Babylon, the great whore with whom the people are committing whoredom. “And Israel joined himself to Baal-peor” is the sin of the people.

It matters not what name is given to the various miasma of efforts the people give themselves to in order to be right with God, they are all whoredom and worthy of death. The sin of whoredom was exemplified by Zimri, an Israelite bringing a Midianitish woman (Cozbi) to the door of the tabernacle to be used by the men of Israel (v. 6). The significance is that she was brought to the men after their sentence for idolatry had been handed down, and the people were weeping for the plague that had begun (vv. 5-6c). In light of the judgment of such things, this man brought this woman to his tent to lie with her. The sin of the people was as that of a brazen reprobate.

3. The Savior. There was a man in Israel that day named Phinehas. His name means “the mouth of brass” and is derived from the word serpent, alluding to the serpent of brass raised up on the pole which proved the salvation of the people. His name suggests the word of judgment. His name also signifies “the face that spares.” Christ is the face of God, God's express image, and though God did not spare him, he spared those whom he represented (2 Cor: 5:21). He was the son of Eleazar whose name means “God has helped” referring to God laying help on one who is mighty, even his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the grandson of Aaron

the high priest whose name means “light bringer.” Phinehas was therefore qualified for that office. He is the priest who is the savior.

Look at how God describes his priesthood (vv. 12-13). He is said to possess the “covenant of peace” (v. 12). Christ is our peace, having made peace through the blood of his cross in order to reconcile the people to God. His priesthood was an everlasting priesthood (Psalm 110:4; Heb. 7:15-25). He was zealous for God (Isaiah 9:6-7; John 8:29). He made atonement for the children of Israel. He covered their sin, remitted their sin, propitiated for and expiated their sin. Phinehas pictures the savior.

4. The salvation. In the context, the sin is represented in its vileness and in its essence by the act of Zimri and Cozbi. The plague represents the wrath of God against sin. In order for the people to be spared, God's justice must be satisfied, his anger must be appeased and that by the death of the sinner (v.4). This seems to be an enigma. How can the people be spared and yet die under the wrath and anger of God? Prior to Phinehas doing what he did, 24,000 people died. Had he not done what he did, the entire outfit would have died! His action, his work “turned the wrath away from the people” (v. 11). It is evident that the first sinner who God killed and the 23,999 that followed did not satisfy justice. You and I dying for sin cannot satisfy God. That is why Hell is eternal. As debtors confined in debtor's prison, we will never earn enough to pay what we owe to God for our disobedience.

How did what Phinehas did differ from God slaying the 24,000. After all, he killed Zimri and Cozbi as they were in the throes of passion. It differed in what it pictured. Their death pictured God dealing with sin in its *essence*. Their slaying pictured Christ being made sin and satisfying justice by death for essential sin. Christ was never a sinner. Even when he was made sin, he was not a sinner. Had he been a sinner, he would not only *not* have been qualified to be the Savior, his death would have accomplished no more than the 24,000 who died that day in the plain of

Moab. He did not become a sinner when sin was imputed to Him, he was made essential sin (worse than a sinner) and “by his death finished the transgression and made an end of sin.” When Phinehas took up that javelin and thrust it through Zimri and Cozbi, it pictured Christ destroying the sin of his people (Heb. 2:14-5; 9:26; 10:12-18; 2 John 3:8, 5). How do I know that the work that Phinehas performed pictured the substitutionary, propitiatory work of Christ? Look at Numbers 25:7-8, 11.

7, And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;

8, And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

11, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.

So, from the lofty perspective of Pisgah, we can look at the people of God as they stand in Christ and rejoice to say, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed

shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.”

And from the plains of Moab we can look at the people and rightly say, “The people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor.”

Paul said it this way, “With the mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin”



THE EPITAPH OF UNBELIEF

Numbers 26:63-65

63, These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.

64, But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.

65, For the LORD had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

(Read all of Numbers 26)

The 26th chapter of Numbers is a long chapter in the word of God. It is the record of the second numbering of the men of Israel who are of age to be ready for battle. Note the profound words of verse 64. “But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.”

Between 38 and 40 years has passed since the first group of men were numbered, and at that time, some 600,000 men made up the number of those who were able to go to war, which had declared their pedigrees, and set forward their standards. Of the 600,000, there remained two men who would lead this new number into the promised land, Joshua and Caleb. The other 599,998 (excluding the house of Aaron [already defrocked and slain on Mt. Hor] and Moses) were now just carcasses, dead men's bones scattered throughout the wilderness. Hell had enlarged herself the past

forty years to be the eternal home of the souls of the men whose epitaph reads “They entered not because of unbelief.”

This is a most somber and sobering thing. Consider for a moment the advantages and privileges had by those who now resided in the bowels of hell. Think of what they had seen and how the God of heaven had cared for them. They had seen the plagues of Egypt and remained untouched by them. They had seen, even to the day of their death, the manna, the fire by night and the cloud by day. They had personally walked between the two walls of water on dry land and had seen their God, the man of war, decimate their enemies beneath the billows of the Red Sea. They had seen Moses come down from Sinai with the Ten Commandments and partook in the ceremonies of the law. Some had seen forty years of lambs and bullocks slain, forty days of atonement and forty years of the presence of the glory of God. In their midst, they had a man who spoke to God face to face as a friend. They had seen the fire come from the Lord to consume the unbelievers and the earth open up and swallow the Sons of Korah. They had been delivered from bondage by blood and by sovereign power. What a sad end to such a multitude of *privileged* individuals.

We know, from the writings of Paul, that though they did not make use of their privileges, their unbelief did not make the word of God of no effect. Though they were of Israel, they were not *true* Israel. They were sons of Abraham, but not sons of Isaac and therefore not children of promise. They were the non-elect, but this is not the way they are described in the word of God. God said that “they entered not because of unbelief.” Election may never be used to account for your unbelief. Election only accounts for your belief. “The election hath obtained it.” Men and women who die in unbelief must account for their privilege, their advantages. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. The sun warms the habitation of the infidel as well as the chosen. Men and women who die in unbelief do so having breathed God's air, lived by God's providential

goodness, eaten God's food and slept in God's shelter. All have seen God's glory in the creation he has made which leaves them without excuse. Millions have had the unique privilege to sit under the preaching of the truth yet have died with gospel hardened hearts. No one even knows what it is to be out of the hands of the blessed mediator, Jesus Christ. There will be an *accounting*. There will be a day of reckoning for those who perish in unbelief.

Our attention is drawn at the last of this chapter to the two remaining individuals who were numbered at the beginning. They are Joshua and Caleb.

Joshua, whose name means “Jehovah is salvation” and whose name is transliterated in the Greek to the name “Jesus,” is one of the two that were first numbered who will enter the promised land. The *Savior* is the *forerunner* of all of the believers who follow. He has entered into heaven for us, to intercede for us. Joshua the son of Nun, the son of posterity is the future of the believer.

Then, there is Caleb whose name means “dog.” There is the Savior and the saved sinner. How appropriate this name of Caleb is! First, it is appropriate in that Caleb was a preacher of the gospel. It was he who spoke the great, confident words of faith to the multitude slain in the wilderness (Num.14:7-9). He bore not the title of Doctor of Divinity, Right Reverend or Monsignor. He was the *dog*; the dog with the word of God and the faith of the elect. There was no air about him to suggest that he could do more than bark, fetch, come when he was called and sit where he was told (1 Cor. 1:21-24). His name is significant also because a dog is known for his bent to the worship of his master. Dog is the root word for “worship” in the Greek. *Proskuneo* literally means; “dog licking his master's hand.” His name is appropriate also in that this was the name of derision given to the Gentiles by the Jews. Thus, his name pictures the bringing in of the Gentiles when the Jews deemed salvation by Christ as a

thing not worthy of their consideration (Acts 13:46). So, here we have the savior and the sinner, the only two left of the original 600,000 entering into the Promise Land.

When this account is recorded for us in the New Testament, it is found in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 (Read 3:1-4:11). Here we see the whole purpose of what took place centuries before in that wilderness. The purpose is to consider Christ. Just as the chapter in Numbers recorded that not one man entered the promised land concluded with the declaration that Joshua and Caleb did, this record in Hebrews draws our attention to the Savior and proceeds to warn the hearer of the gospel not to follow the example of those who fell.

We need not claim to be of the household of Christ if we do not “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Heb. 3:6,14; 14:1). Some may, in their minds, begin to make lists of what they believe it is to hold fast to the end. Assuredly, these lists will be comprised of striving to do things that will be evidence of salvation. However, since the opposite of holding fast is well described as “not entering in because of unbelief,” then holding fast and firm to the end is nothing other than *belief* (striving to enter in his rest).

These fell because the privilege they experienced, the advantages they had and the gospel they heard was not mixed with *faith* (4:2). Their experience was earthly and earthy. Their knowledge never left the visible to enter into the realm of the invisible. Their understanding had no Heaven in it. Their hearts were bound to the wilderness and never mounted on the wings of faith to soar in the ether of the presence of God. They heard what we hear, but it was never mixed with faith. Faith, belief connects you to heaven. Faith connects you to the true reality of this world, the invisible. “They entered not because of unbelief.”

Hear well the warnings. Hear the admonitions. Today, while it is today, if you will hear his voice, harden not you hearts as did those whose

carcasses fell in the wilderness (Heb. 3:7-8, 12-15, 19; 4:1, 7-11). Have you been given light? Have you sat idly in the light of creation, the light of the gospel? Walk in the light you have been given. Take advantage of the privilege you have (Consider the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius). Strive to enter into the rest accomplished by Christ. Consider Christ. Labor to enter into that rest lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. Do not think that tomorrow exists for you? Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your heart (See: Matthew 10:14-15; 11:20-24).

There is a world out there that is dying because they cannot get past the *visible*. There is a world out there that is feeding on the ashes of a false hope. You are privileged to have heard the gospel. Believe. With urgency I say, believe today! Harden not your hearts as these did who fell as carcasses in the wilderness.



FAITH AND TRUTH

A Message for the New Year

Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12

Numbers 27:1, Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.

2, And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,

3, Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons.

4, Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.

5, And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.

6, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

7, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.

8, And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.

9, And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren.

10, And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren.

11, And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Numbers 36:1, And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:

2, And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters.

3, And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance.

4, And when the jubile of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.

5, And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well.

6, This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry.

7, So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.

8, And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers.

9, Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance.

10, Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad:

11, For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons:

12, And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.

When Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and before God finished the work of destroying all the men who were above the age of twenty, he established that the land that belonged to the father's whom he had destroyed would pass to their sons, and all tribal lands would remain

with the families (Num. 26:53-56). When he had finished ridding Israel of those who would not enter because of unbelief, there was not a man left among the original number save for Joshua and Caleb.

Among those who were now carcasses in the wilderness was one of the tribe of Manasseh, a son of Joseph whose name was Zelophehad. This man had five daughters who are named in Chapter 27 and verse 1. He did not have any sons. These five daughters came before the princes, Eleazar the high priest and Moses with a petition. Their petition is found in vv. 3-4. Moses, being the one assigned to judge in such matters, did not feel he had the wisdom to do so, and as he had done at other times when no precedent had been established by God, he sought the Lord for the answer (v.5). The Lord not only granted the petition of the five daughters but spoke of them in a manner that revealed that the Lord was pleased with them (v. 7a “The daughters of Zelophehad speak right”).

What a thing this is! The five daughters pleased God. There is but one way that God is said to be pleased by anyone, and that is by faith (Heb. 11:6). This is especially poignant in that it is revealed in light of the penalty suffered by the masses, including their father, for unbelief. In their petition they distinguished themselves from their father in the matter of unbelief. Their petition proved to be a testimony of *faith*.

First, they honored and justified God in the punishment of sin. Though their father had not taken part in the open rebellion of Korah, he had nonetheless evidently *not* believed the word of truth proclaimed by Caleb and Joshua concerning the possession of the promise land. He had died justly “in his own sin.” His daughters ascribed honor and righteousness to God in the slaying of their father.

Secondly, in faith, they approached the matter of their standing on the condition of God's equitable dealings with the people.

Thirdly, they approached the matter in honesty and belief, declaring that they believed the testimony of Caleb and were ready to go up and

possess the land that God had promised. They were thus named in Jewish writings as the “five wise virgins.” Though their *father* died in unbelief, *they* believed God and sought to possess what rightly belonged to faith, the promise of God.

“The daughters of Zelophehad speak right.” This is the testimony of God and is also the response of God to faith wherever it is found in scripture (Matthew 15:28).

Imagine this scene for a moment. The possession of property was a matter of law, and it primarily belonged to the firstborn male. Zelophehad's name means “first born.” Women did not play a part in the matter of ownership but were possessors only as they were connected by marital status. Here, before Moses, Eleazar, and all the princes of Israel, these women came to gain possession of the land portion that belonged to their father. The petition, being far beyond the arena of human wisdom, must be adjudicated by *God himself*. In the face of all these men, rightful owners and possessors of the portion of their fathers, God honors these women and establishes a statute, a law, and a principle (v.8).

God so honored these women's faith that he made their request a law of the land. God always honors faith, simple, plain, unadulterated, honest faith. Mark well the examples of such trust in the word of God. Barren Hannah prayed in faith and God opened her womb. Deborah believed God and defeated the enemies of the gospel. Ruth believed the word of God and married the kinsman redeemer. Mary believed God and was graced to be the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth believed God and birthed into this world one who was greater than the prophets, even John the Baptist. The Syrophenician woman believed God and was told by Christ, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” Though their father Zelophehad's bones lay moldering in the wilderness and there was no son to claim the

inheritance, faith rose above the evident obstacles and believed God to possess the land.

Faith cannot overdraw its account on God's bank. He delights to give, and give and give again. The Spirit of God in the believer is there to reveal the things freely given him of God. Sadly, the world often gets in our way, and times of ease cause us to forget God and anesthetize faith. But let the trial come and the trouble rise as the billows of the roaring sea, and plain and honest faith will consume our lives.

These daughters exemplify the faith of the elect (James 1:2-8). They asked in faith (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23-24). I care not to number the times that these words, these precious promises have cut me to the quick. Many times, after gumming up the works, I have been stopped in my tracks and said to myself, "Why didn't you ask God?"

These daughters faced no such dilemma. They asked, and their request was graciously honored. "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right." They spoke right because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Only the righteous can speak right before God. Their faith is not to be equated with the "name it and claim it" presumption of false faith and useless religion. Faith, true faith, does not presume. It believes the promise of God based upon the standing that God has given the believer in Christ. Faith comes to God as a father knowing, believing, that if bread is requested, it will not receive a stone. These believed God and they received the blessing. They did not act timidly but with confidence in God who had promised, and their faith is a shining light in the midst of the church in the wilderness.

There is another principle taught by the life of these five wise virgins. This is not the end of this story. Faith is honored by God, but never at the expense of truth nor the expense of the claims of other believers. Faith operates in the realm that God has appointed to it and within the bounds that God has put upon it. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:21-23. What if what is

rightfully yours could bring harm to your brother or sister? Could such a thing be? (See: Romans 14:5-6. 13-23; 2 Cor. 8:9-13) It is possible that what is rightfully yours in faith may not be an edification of your brother or sister and may be used only at the expense of their faith and good conscience, thus putting a stumbling block before them. In our text, the daughters of Zelophehad, who were of the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, gained by faith the possession of the portion of land that belonged to the descendant of Joseph, and rightfully so. There was however a potential problem. Being unmarried women, there was the possibility that they might marry someone of a different tribe than that of Joseph, and in the year of Jubilee, that land would come into the possession of their husband, and the tribe of Joseph would lose part of its rightful inheritance.

Look at Numbers 36:1-4.

1, And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:

2, And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters.

3, And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance.

4, And when the jubile of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.

No principle of faith shall annul any other principle of faith. The laws concerning property were paramount to the identity of the children of Israel. For one to lose part of his inheritance was to lose his equal standing before the other tribes and call into question the righteousness of God's dealings and promises to his people. The people of God are heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. There is no hierarchy in the body of Christ. All God's sons and daughters are on a perfectly equal standing. When Moses was confronted with this possible dilemma, he settled it in a way that both honored the faith of the daughters and the rightful claims of the sons of Joseph.

5, And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well.

6, This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry.

7, So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.

8, And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers.

9, Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance. (Num. 36:5-9).

The daughters were free to marry whoever they wanted, as long as it was in the lineage of Manasseh. Faith did not overturn or despise the law but rather honored it.

The daughters of Zelophehad were believers. Look at Num. 36:10-12.

10, Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad:

11, For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons:

12, And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.

In faith they believed the promise, possessed the promise and obeyed the Lord for the good of the people and the glory of God. In faith they established the law. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). “Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad.” Faith believes God. Faith seeks God for the promise. Faith obeys God. Faith works for the welfare of the people of God considering others in spite of what it rightfully possesses (Gal. 5:5-6; Romans 13:10; Phil. 2:1-4).

The daughters of Zelophehad stand as a shining example of the faith of the believer, and their faith is worthy of emulation.



MOSES, THE PASTOR

Numbers 27:12-18

12, And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel.

13, And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.

14, For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.

15, And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying,

16, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

17, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

18, And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

When Moses twice smote the Rock that followed the people in the wilderness, God declared that he would not lead the people into the promise land (Num 20:12). In the text before us, we hear the Lord again proclaim this fact to Moses and tell him that he will die before the children enter in. The Lord repeats this fact in Deut. 3:27, 32:49 and 34:1). Each

time it is repeated, it is significant in and of itself and relative to the final revelation of what took place on Pisgah when God took his faithful servant home to be with him forever.

I have found over the years of sitting at the bedside of the dying that it is important to listen to those who are about to leave this world and go to the next. Society, and even the law, places great significance on the words of the dying. At the time of death, when all that has been naturally known and embraced is slipping out of view, that which cannot be shaken remains and comes to the fore. At that time, the words spoken and the subjects addressed are without the pull and influence of the passing world. When Linda Stalnaker was dying, she said, "I have no righteous of my own, I see the uselessness of my own merit. I rest wholly in the righteousness of Christ." When Kaiser Wilnoty was near the end of his life, he said to me, "Stay here and preach the gospel." A preacher I knew went to visit a dying friend and member of his church. He asked the dear brother if he was ready to meet the Lord. The dying brother replied, "If you told me the truth, I'm ready to meet the Lord." In these statements, that which is of eternal weight and consequence is revealed as well as that which is of true importance to the *believer*. The heart is open, disclosed, and often what is *seen* is most precious and held with great value.

Moses, when told again that he would not see the promised land and that he would die on this mountain, believed God. Though he would not die immediately, Moses saw himself as good as dead because he had heard the truth from the mouth of the LORD. Jehovah the savior had spoken, and what he had spoken would come to pass. "Thus sayeth the Lord."

As we shall see in weeks to come, this wonderful interaction between God and his servant will prove a wealth of spiritual knowledge, especially in relation to the believer's relationship to the Law and the Law's relationship to the believer.

In this passage we see Moses facing death. His response is of great importance to further understanding this amazing character and his role in the grand scheme of providence. The words of Moses in verses 16 and 17 reveal the heart of Moses as a pastor; “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.”

I want us to consider three things in this statement and petition of Moses. 1. His estimation of God. 2. His resignation and agreement with the will of God. 3. His pastor's heart.

1. Moses' estimation of God. “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh...” (v. 16). In these words, the reverence that Moses, the servant of God, has for his Sovereign is revealed. He addresses God in the character of whom he desires to make his request. He addresses him as LORD, Jehovah Savior. He approaches God as the Sovereign giver of mercy and grace. He places himself as a beggar at mercy's door. This is the only proper manner to approach Jehovah. The actual rendering of this phrase is but one word, “LORD.” The words “Let the” are understood though not spoken. If he is LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, then any audience with him presupposes the understanding that the granting of whatever is asked is up to him alone.

Men may bandy about the name LORD without much care in this world, but those who know him, seek him, and desire help from him, come to him knowing that he is LORD and that he does as he pleases in all things. No man, not even the perfect man Jesus Christ, approaches God in any other way. The leper approached Christ with the words, “LORD, if thou wilt, thou canst.” Christ approached his Father saying, “Not my will but thine be done.” The disciples were taught to pray “thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” James, writing under the inspiration of God and

addressing presumption said, “For that ye ought to say. If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.” He is God overall and thus may only be approached beseeching him to do his will. Moses' estimation of God was that he was God and that the affairs of men were in his hands.

2. Moses' resignation and agreement with the will of God. The words that Moses speaks are in light of the fact that he is going to die and that he is not going to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. His words are such that they prove he has accepted his appointed end. There is no mention of his impending death, no morose attitude, no sorrow. He is resigned to God's will, and in being so, he is in agreement with God. He and his God will walk together to his place of death, and two cannot walk together except they be agreed. He knows that he will not die separated from God, but with God and in the presence of his dear savior. When Moses came down from the mount and his face was such that the people had to veil it when he read the law, it was because Moses understood what the law was saying. We later learned that what he understood was the gospel which God has hidden from the wise and the prudent (2 Cor 3:14-18).

What could possibly cause one to not regard his death as anything but a matter of course? The gospel alone gives such comfort in the face of death. Perhaps Moses knew that he could not lead the people into the promised land, and it was only right for him not to do so. Our Lord said that Moses wrote of Him. We may only speculate how much of the New Covenant Moses understood, but hearing the promise of his death from Jehovah the Savior, did not make him look to himself at all, at least not in this instance (Heb. 11:23-28; Psalm 103:7). His was a holy resignation. It was not “praise God *anyway*,” but “praise God *because*.” When Paul was leaving the elder's at Ephesus in Acts 20, he displayed the same kind of holy resolve (Acts 20:22-25; 21:10-14; Heb 11:13, 39-40).

Moses was shown the promised land, but he viewed more than that earthly acreage. The realization of death does not cause the eyes to see the world, but the new world, the city whose builder and maker is God. From Pisgah, with the Savior by his side, he saw Immanuel's land, the land that is fairer than day, the land seen and embraced with the eyes of faith.

3. His Pastor's heart. In this passage we get a glimpse into the heart of Moses and see the heart of the pastor. His concern is that the flock not be without a leader, a Shepard. "Set a man over the congregation" (v. 16). Moses did not wish to render an opinion as to who that was to be. He only desired that he be replaced by a man of God's own choosing. His concern was for the welfare of the flock. As for him, his destiny was not a point of concern. He calmly left them to the hand of his Savior. His loving heart is fixed on the care of the people. If Israel's needs were met, Moses was content. He exemplifies the mind of Christ (Philippians2:1-8). He exemplifies the heart of the pastor (Acts 20:28-32; Gal. 4:19; 2 Tim. 2:10). "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd."

Read John 10:14-16.

14, I am the good *shepherd*, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15, As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16, And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.



MY SACRIFICES

Numbers 28:2

2, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.

Read also Numbers 28 & 29

Numbers 28:

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.

3, And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering.

4, The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even;

5, And a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat offering, mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil.

6, It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.

7, And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering.

8, And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even: as the meat offering of the morning, and as the drink offering thereof, thou shalt offer it, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

9, And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof:

10, This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.

11, And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot;

12, And three tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one bullock; and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one ram;

13, And a several tenth deal of flour mingled with oil for a meat offering unto one lamb; for a burnt offering of a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.

14, And their drink offerings shall be half an hin of wine unto a bullock, and the third part of an hin unto a ram, and a fourth part of an hin unto a lamb: this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year.

15, And one kid of the goats for a sin offering unto the LORD shall be offered, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.

16, And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD.

17, And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.

18, In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein:

19, But ye shall offer a sacrifice made by fire for a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year: they shall be unto you without blemish:

20, And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil: three tenth deals shall ye offer for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram;

21, A several tenth deal shalt thou offer for every lamb, throughout the seven lambs:

22, And one goat for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you.

23, Ye shall offer these beside the burnt offering in the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering.

24, After this manner ye shall offer daily, throughout the seven days, the meat of the sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: it shall be offered beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.

25 And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work.

26, Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the LORD, after your weeks be out, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work:

27, But ye shall offer the burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; two young bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year;

28, And their meat offering of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto one bullock, two tenth deals unto one ram,

29, A several tenth deal unto one lamb, throughout the seven lambs;

30, And one kid of the goats, to make an atonement for you.

31, Ye shall offer them beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, (they shall be unto you without blemish) and their drink offerings.

Numbers 29:

1, And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.

2, And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish:

3, And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram,

4, And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:

5, And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you:

6, Beside the burnt offering of the month, and his meat offering, and the daily burnt offering, and his meat offering, and their drink offerings, according unto their manner, for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.

7, And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein:

8, But ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD for a sweet savour; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year; they shall be unto you without blemish:

9, And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals to a bullock, and two tenth deals to one ram,

10, A several tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:

11, One kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering of it, and their drink offerings.

12, And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days:

13, And ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish:

14, And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto every bullock of the thirteen bullocks, two tenth deals to each ram of the two rams,

15, And a several tenth deal to each lamb of the fourteen lambs:

16, And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

17, And on the second day ye shall offer twelve young bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without spot:

18, And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

19, And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering thereof, and their drink offerings.

20, And on the third day eleven bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish;

21, And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

22, And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.

23, And on the fourth day ten bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:

24, Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

25, And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

26, And on the fifth day nine bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without spot:

27, And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

28, And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.

29, And on the sixth day eight bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:

30, And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

31, And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

32, And on the seventh day seven bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:

33, And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

34, And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

35, On the eighth day ye shall have a solemn assembly: ye shall do no servile work therein:

36, But ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: one bullock, one ram, seven lambs of the first year without blemish:

37, Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullock, for the ram, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

38, And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.

39, These things ye shall do unto the LORD in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your meat offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.

40, And Moses told the children of Israel according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.

The 28th and 29th of Numbers is a rehearsal of the various offerings that were established in the book of Leviticus and repeated in Numbers 1 through 8 and chapter 33. Since we have looked at these sacrifices at length, I'm going to look at both chapters 28 and 29 in this study, not expositively but in the light of the personal possessive pronoun "My" in verse 2. This little word reveals a great deal about worshiping God. Note that our God speaks of "*my offering*," "*my bread*," and "*my sacrifices*." He speaks of "offering" these to him and "for a sweet savor" unto him.

There are 71 verses in these two chapters. In reading them, a pattern emerges. There is a sacrifice mentioned that is not counted among those referred to in verse two. Those in verse 2 are sweet savor offerings and account for 58 of the 71 verses. The other thirteen verses deal with a sacrifice which, though concerning the work of Christ, deals with what Christ did for man, the sinner. The sacrifice in these 13 verses is the sin offering and has to do with the elect confessing belief that their sin was transferred to *Christ*, and his accomplished work to *them*. In effect, the sin offering is the aspect of the sacrifice that represents what Christ did for, and what he means to, the believer. The remainder of the offerings included in the words of verse 2 and accentuated with the personal possessive pronoun “my,” refer to what Christ did for God. This does not insinuate that what Christ did for his people is of less importance. Nothing could be further from the truth. The very foundation of man's communion with God is the substitutionary work of Christ. All of the blessings that flow to the believer are a result of Christ being the sin offering (Eph. 1:3). The believer rejoices, gives thanks and gladly hears of the work of Christ as he worships the God of his salvation.

The distinction is one of weight, not importance. In other words, in the salvation of the elect Christ did more for the Father than he did for us. The primary emphasis of worship is about what Christ did for God which resulted in God doing something for us. When Christ offered himself to God, our sin was judged, forgiven and put away. Nothing can be taken from that, and it is our sweet confession that he accomplished our salvation. Oh, but in that glorious life and death, we were but recipients of the necessary thing, that Christ *pleased* God.

In the context, day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month even to a full year, the sacrifices were offered to God and were a sweet savor to him (Prov. 8:30). The sacrifices and offerings represent what Christ is to God. He is his beloved son in whom God is well pleased. The morning and

evening lambs and the meat or meal offerings were burnt offerings and were a sweet savor to God (v. 28:6). The two lambs that were Sabbath offerings were burnt offerings along with the double meat offerings and drink offering, speaking of the excellency of Christ finishing the work and entering into his rest (vv. 28:9-11). The sin offering had to do with the vileness of our sin, and the burnt offering had to do with the excellency of the sacrifice God-ward. In the beginning of months (v. 28:11), in the feast of the passover and the feast of the unleavened bread (vv. 28:16-25), in the feast of first fruits (vv. 26-31), in the feast of trumpets (vv. 29:1-6) and in the feast of tabernacles (vv. 29:7-38), the singular theme is Christ as a sweet savor. The sin offering is never lacking, but the sweet savor offerings hold a prominent place in this passage. The sin offering is spoken of as “one kid of the goats,” perhaps alluding to the “once for all” offering of Christ for us. The sweet savor offerings number 14 lambs, thirteen bullocks, and large portions of meal, oil and fine flour.

Since all sacrifices represent worship, this passage—these chapters—teach us that though the foundation of worship is an understanding of what Christ has done for us, the preeminence of worship is the delight that God has in Christ (Col.1:18-19). It is the blessedness of the *person* that makes the work worthy of praise. The gospel is the *person* who was crucified (Gal. 1:6; 6:14). He is the delight of God. He did much more for the Father than he did for us.

Though the believer has trials and struggles with sin these are not to be the thrust and intent of worship. The truth is that dwelling on our troubles is directly proportionate to our failure to worship. The reason we are able to worship is that the sin offering has been accomplished. But as much as that accomplished for us, we will truly worship when we see what it did for God the Father. Our trials and troubles are not his bread (v. 28:2 “my bread”). Christ is God's bread and is the impetus of worship. This does not mean that we are to be oblivious to our trials or pretend that they

do not exist. We are admonished to cast all our cares upon him because he cares for us. Remember that Christ, in that great sacrifice to God has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. In truth, our sorrows are his, and he has taken our sin as his own. If we can but believe, we have nothing left but to worship God by delighting in his Son. We come to God with Christ. In worship we offer him his offering, his bread and his sacrifice for a sweet savor. The proper attitude concerning what Christ did for us is that the weight and magnitude of that glorious, successful substitutionary sacrifice is what it did for God (Romans 3:24-26). One man said that God had to do something for himself before he could do anything for you.

The gospel is a rehearsal of the preeminence of Christ (2 Cor. 2:14-15). The preeminence of Christ is the catalyst of our life in the Church (Eph 5:1-2). When the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us, they all are about what he did for God. He pleased God, fulfilled God's law, satisfied God's justice and lived and died for the honor and glory of God. He is God's delight (John 3:35; 5:23; 8:29). Worship is not about us; it is about Christ. As precious as Christ is to us, he is more precious to his Father. Worship is not about our salvation; it is about our salvation honoring God. May our message, methods and music be fixed on offering to God what he delights in—Christ!

“Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.” (Num. 28:2)



VOWS

Numbers 30

1, And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded.

2, If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.

3, If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth;

4, And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand.

5, But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her.

6, And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul;

7, And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.

8, But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her.

9, But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her.

10, And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath;

11, And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.

12, But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her.

13, Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void.

14, But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her: he confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them.

15, But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them; then he shall bear her iniquity.

16, These are the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, being yet in her youth in her father's house.

This chapter relates the laws concerning vows or oaths made by men and women. As you read it, I am sure you noted the law concerning the vow made by a man and a vow made by a woman are the same as they relate to the one who made the vow. In each case the vow is binding to the *individual*, and they are accountable to keep it. In other words, a vow, no matter who makes, is not a thing that the persons themselves may break.

In the case of a man making a vow, that vow must be kept and can never, under any circumstances be broken. In the case of a woman making a vow, under certain circumstances, the vow may be disannulled or forgiven, and she is then removed from being accountable for the performance of the vow. The woman cannot break the vow herself but may be released from the obligation of keeping it. The way that a woman's vow may be forgiven is only if her father, if she is unmarried, or her husband forgives her of it on the day that he hears her make the vow. If her father or husband keeps his peace on the day that she makes the vow, then she is obligated to perform it. However, if either decides on a later date to release her from the vow, she is released from performing it, but the vow is deemed to be broken. The husband or father is then counted as responsible for breaking the vow. He must then bear the iniquity of the broken vow and bear the penalty for breaking it.

The woman's vow must be confirmed or disannulled on the day that it was made, or the vow becomes the obligation of the husband or father if confirmed or disannulled at a later date. If the woman is a widow or a divorcee and had made a vow that the husband did not disannul before he died, she is bound to keep the vow. If she had been released from her vow by her husband before his death or before the divorce, then she was forgiven the vow.

The two governing principles established here are that a man who makes a vow is bound to perform it without any exception. There are no mitigating circumstances by which a *man* is allowed to forego the keeping of the vow that he makes. The second is that a woman is bound to the vow she makes if her father or husband does not forgive her of it, but she is free from the vow if it is forgiven by her father or husband on the day that the vow is made.

The overriding principle concerning the vow of the woman is two-fold. First, she cannot disoblige or forgive herself from keeping her vow.

Secondly, the forgiveness of keeping the vow is wholly at the discretion of the man (v. 13).

Though the vow here considered may apply to any vow or oath, our Lord does, in his wisdom and kindness toward us, narrow the scope to a particular kind of vow. In verse 13 the vow is referred to as one that afflicts the soul. This is usually used in the scripture in reference to fasting (Isaiah 58:5b). Fasting, though ordained for certain ceremonies (i.e. Day of Atonement), is usually done as a response to a time of trouble or conflict. Fasting is a picture of forgoing the persons will in the desire that the Lord's will be both revealed and accomplished. The abstinence of fasting is from food which removes the person's strength to rely upon himself. This is indeed the affliction of the soul because the natural desire of the soul is to fix its own problems rather than to fall on the mercy of God and sue for his will to be done. Truly, the fast only takes place when the situation is so dire that there is no other recourse than to fall on God (Mark 2:18-20). This fast, this vow then, is in reference to the doing of Gods will. Once again, if the man vows such a vow, he is bound to perform it or suffer the punishment of breaking it. The woman, however, by certain means (the will of the father or the husband) may be forgiven her vow.

We know, by the declaration of scripture, that these, as well as all Old Testament scripture, are types, shadows and pictures of Christ and his work. Specifically to the book of Numbers, these relate to Christ and his church. This is seen in the manner in which the man and the woman are described concerning her vow. It is important to note, they are described in the language of familial or marital relationship in reference to her vow. In reference to the vow of the man, no relationship of any sort is mentioned. If he makes a vow the disposal thereof is his sole responsibility to perform. As he relates to the woman and her vow, he is described as either a father or a husband. The woman's vow is not even considered except in

terms of *relationship*. The woman is referred to as a daughter, wife, widow or divorcee. All the descriptions of her are of one who has, or has had, a familial or marital relationship with a man.

In the hands of legalist religion, this could be used to once again put women in the place of legal subjection to men. However, legalists do not understand the gospel, and therefore, they are in error in every way that makes a woman less than a man. Christ liberated women from the legal bonds of servitude to the man. Even as the wife is to be in subjection to the husband, it is wholly in reference to her privilege to voluntarily and without any legal constraints, exhibit the church's subjection to Christ her husband and lover of her soul.

The picture then unfolds before us. This chapter has to do with Christ and his bride. There is no application here to the unbeliever. This speaks of the redeemed church, of Christ and his bride. The title of father and husband both are attributed to Christ (Isaiah 9:6; Hosea 2:16; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-31).

There is another element in this context that must be considered and is truly what engulfs the whole of the matters set before us. All of this is in the realm of *law*. The first verse declares this to be the commandment of God and therefore is the law or presiding principle of all that is afterward revealed. The vowing, the keeping of the vow or the forgiving of the vow, is done in strict accordance with the law of God. God's law must be kept and honored. A *man* then must keep the vow in order to fulfill the law. A daughter, wife, widow or ex-wife can fulfill the law by keeping the vow or by being forgiven the vow by her father or her husband.

There is a veritable wealth of grace in this chapter. How sweet is the revelation of the mystery of the gospel in the Old Testament!

Our Lord is a *man*. He is *the* man, Christ Jesus. Consequently, if he has made a vow, he is bound to keep it, perform it and fully accomplish it, or he has not fulfilled the law. He made a vow before the world was. He

became surety for his people (Heb. 7:22). Surety is a vow to pay the debt of someone. In this case, he vowed to pay all the sin debt of his bride, his elect, his church (Matthew 1:21). Part and parcel with that suretyship is the releasing or forgiving of his bride of the accomplishment of her vow.

What is her vow? It is the same always. Every believer desires to do the will of God. Every believer spends his or her life in some form or another promising (vowing) to do better, to live right or to be better (Romans 7:25). However, they personally always fail to perform (Romans 7 15-24; Gal. 5:17). In her case (*our* case), “Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Ecc. 5:5) surely applies. However, it seems we cannot restrain from making promises to God that we cannot keep.

The gracious thing is this; if Christ kept his vow, then the believer is forgiven his vow. One might say that in our text, forgiveness was at the discretion of Christ. Our text clearly states the husband may either bind the wife to the vow or release her according to his pleasure. That proposition is answered in the fact that he vowed to become our surety.

Nothing but love for God and love for his people compelled him to do so (Romans 5:8; Gal. 2:20; 2 John 4:10; Rev. 1:5).

Since he loved us and displayed that love by becoming surety for us, it was his *pleasure* to forgive us (Isaiah 45:23-25; Eph. 1:5, 7, 9; 2 Tim. 1:9). Christ, being a man, kept his vow.

The words of Christ were the vocabulary of a man who had made a vow; “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matthew 5:17-18; 12:50).

Go with Christ to the garden of Gethsemane and hear one who, as a man, must keep his vow; “Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:38-39).

Listen to the words of Christ in the Psalm of his crucifixion; “They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded” (Ps. 22:25).

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:28-30).

In becoming our surety, he forgives us our vow, and since he kept the law for us, the forgiveness of our vow is yet the keeping of the law (Romans 3:31).

This I know about us as the bride of Christ; We will keep making our vows whether openly or in the privacy of our mind. This is not wrong. It is commendable and normal for the child of God to want to do better, be better and endeavor to accomplish his or her vows. The problem is that we cannot keep them. When we fail, just remember that our Lord did not (text v. 12). Our Lord’s honor is at stake. If he does not immediately make void the wife’s vow on the day that he hears it, then the iniquity of her breaking it falls on him (v. 15; Genesis 43:8-9; 44:30-32). No worries! Read 1 John 3:5. “In him is no sin.” He immediately forgives us our vows making them void because he has accomplished his.

How sweet this is? When we fail, we are not prescribed a formula for undoing our failure. That in itself would require us to make yet another

doomed vow. No! Because he has accomplished all for us, he utterly forgives our vows and makes them void (1 John 1:9). We see our sin; he does not (Heb 10:17). He is faithful (to his vow) and just (justified in having forgiven us by the work of Christ) to forgive (make us know we have been forgiven) us our sins and (immediately) cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Finally, we need to spend a moment on v. 9. We know the bride of Christ will never be a widow or a divorcee. Christ is life and shall never die nor leave her a widow. She has *eternal* life, and therefore, the marriage which is an eternal union cannot be ended by death. Since he loves her and she loves him, divorce is not a possibility.

What then is this teaching? This is about the believer's relationship to the law. The words “widow” and “divorcee” have to do with marriage. You can be neither if you were not once married. Marriage begins with a vow. Our modern vow is to love, honor and obey till death separates us. In one instance, the vow is no longer in effect because the husband died. In the other, the vow is no longer in effect because of a legal divorce (adultery or abandonment). In both, naturally speaking, the vow is ineffectual. In the case of the widow, a husband is no longer in the picture. In the case of the divorcee, the husband no longer has any rule over the wife—she is no longer his wife.

In our original parents, we made a vow to obey God. Though it is not recorded it is nonetheless understood. In taking possession of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did so in agreement with the single prohibition that God required of them. They took the garden agreeing and intending not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In effect, their possession of the garden was a vow to obey God concerning the requirement of possessing it. The fact that a vow was understood is seen in the conversation between Eve and the serpent. When told that she could eat of every tree, she responded in the language of the penalty of breaking

a vow (Gen. 3:2-3). Adam, not being deceived, willfully disobeyed the command and willfully broke the vow that he had made. Thus, he plunged the whole of humanity into sin and his vow breaking was imputed to all his progeny.

With the application of the words "widow" and "divorce," the law is intimated to be our husband, to whom we are to be wed until death. Keeping that in mind read vv. 9-12 of the text. Then read Romans 7:1-4 which says, "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

We are the law's widow, and since our surety fulfilled the law in ever jot and tittle (putting it to death), the marriage we had to the law is null and void. Like a divorce, the law no longer has rule over us (Romans 6:14). The law is dead to us (making us a widow), and we are dead to it (as if we were divorced). Now, we are married to another, even the chiefest among ten thousand. Forgiven our vows, we rest in his sweet and gracious love. Having done all for us, he requires nothing of us but voluntary praise and thanksgiving. His love for us is our incentive to do that which honors Him. Often, we will vow and fail, but he has already forgiven *our* vows having fully kept *his* vow and charged to our account that we kept them *ourselves* (Romans 8:1-4).

This is the teaching of Numbers 30. This is the teaching concerning our vows, our relationship to the law and its relationship to us. This is the teaching of our Lord's effectual suretyship.

May God bless it to our understanding.

A DIFFERENT WAR

Numbers 31

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.

3, And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian.

4, Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war.

5, So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

6, And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand.

7, And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.

8, And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.

9, And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.

10, And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.

11, And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts.

12, And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and unto the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by Jordan near Jericho.

13, And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp.

14, And Moses was wroth with the officers of the host, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle.

15, And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive?

16, Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

17, Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him.

18, But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.

19, And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day.

20, And purify all your raiment, and all that is made of skins, and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood.

21, And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses;

22, Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead,

23, Every thing that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water.

24, And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.

25, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

26, Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation:

27, And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation:

28, And levy a tribute unto the LORD of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, both of the persons, and of the beeves, and of the asses, and of the sheep:

29, Take it of their half, and give it unto Eleazar the priest, for an heave offering of the LORD.

30, And of the children of Israel's half, thou shalt take one portion of fifty, of the persons, of the beeves, of the asses, and of the flocks, of all manner of beasts, and give them unto the Levites, which keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.

31, And Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.

32, And the booty, being the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep,

33, And threescore and twelve thousand beeves,

34, And threescore and one thousand asses,
35, And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him.

36, And the half, which was the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and thirty thousand and five hundred sheep:

37, And the LORD'S tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen.

38, And the beeves were thirty and six thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute was threescore and twelve.

39, And the asses were thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the LORD'S tribute was threescore and one.

40, And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute was thirty and two persons.

41, And Moses gave the tribute, which was the LORD'S heave offering, unto Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses.

42, And of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided from the men that warred,

43, (Now the half that pertained unto the congregation was three hundred thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred sheep,

44, And thirty and six thousand beeves,

45, And thirty thousand asses and five hundred,

46, And sixteen thousand persons;)

47, Even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses.

48, And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses:

49, And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us.

50, We have therefore brought an oblation for the LORD, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the LORD.

51, And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of them, even all wrought jewels.

52, And all the gold of the offering that they offered up to the LORD, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels.

53, (For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.)

54, And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.

This record of Israel's attack on the Midianites is a very unique part in the history of the people of God. Up until this time the Midianites were, if not friends of Israel, unthreatening neighbors. The two nations co-existed, and the Midianites were involved in aiding Israel. Midian was the power tribe of the region. They were nomadic and involved in commerce with Egypt and other surrounding nations. It was a caravan of Midian that transported Joseph to Egypt, which eventuated in the forming of Israel into a great nation. Jethro, a ruler of the Midianites, harbored the fugitive Moses when

he was on the lam from Egypt. Moses' wife was a Midianite woman, and it was in the employ of Jethro that Moses learned the trade of shepherd that would serve him well as he tended the flock of God in the wilderness.

There was no political, geographical or nationalistic reason for this war. Since God did not cause his people to war for religion for the purpose of converting other religions at the point of a sword, this battle was not between God and Baal-peor. Such would be foolish because it would have God giving credence to a non-existent god of men's imaginations. The existence of false religion in the world is not, and has never been, a reason for war except in the warped imagination of mentally challenged zealots. God deals with his people, his elect, and makes use of all that is false for the good of his people and the glory of his name's sake (Isaiah 43:3; Romans 9:17; 2 Cor. 11:19).

The truth has never had the intent or design of converting the whole world. The truth is for the elect and is designed to convert the elect (Matt. 13:11; 19:11). The war of Christianity is not, nor has it ever been, a war with other religions. Christianity is at war with the realm of hell. It is a spiritual war that is about the heart and mind, not the geography of this world. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world. The war of our text was about avenging the children of God and the name of the Lord.

Another interesting aspect of this attack on the Midianites was that the two men of Israel who had shown themselves most equipped to lead an army were not mentioned in the make-up of the troops nor assigned as leaders. Neither Moses nor Joshua went into battle. Rather, Phinehas, a priest was set to be at the front of the fray. He took with him the holy instruments and the trumpets to blow. Some have suggested that he took the ark of the covenant and the golden bowl, but this is unlikely because he was not the high priest, and those holy instruments did not pertain to the normal priesthood. The phrase in v. 6 is most probably interpreted “the

holy instruments, even the trumpets” because these were used to sound the attack or retreat in the battle.

After the battle was waged, won and the spoils of war were taken which included the captured women and children, Moses then has the captains kill every male child and every woman who had lain with a man. These things, though drastic, are necessary that the name of the Lord and the children of Israel be avenged. These women and their male offspring, probably born as a result of illicit relationships with Israelite men, were the consequence of following the counsel of Balaam and therefore the reason the name of the Lord had been defamed (v.16).

Another thing that is interesting is that a percentage of the booty taken, after being purified by fire and by water was given to the Levites and to the high priest for the maintenance of the priesthood.

All these things make this war unique, and to apply it typically to the general warfare of the gospel against the fortress of hell does not fit. The warfare of the gospel against the fortress of hell is not to avenge the name of the Lord but is to declare his name to a lost and perishing world. It is most assuredly not to establish Christianity as an imperialist ideology bent on forcibly dominating the world. It is not about politics or the legislation of morality.

To understand the reason for the war occurring in our text and how it applies to us, we must first remember that the whole of Numbers is about the *church* in the world. This war is about the result of the mixture of truth with error. It is about the enticement and submission to the wiles of that which is false. It is the mixture of the flesh and the spirit here pictured by the illicit coupling of the worshippers of God with the worshippers of Baal-peor. This war is about vengeance against that which is false and what it had already done to the people of God.

The fruit of the relationship (here typified by the male children born of it) is a mixture of the false and the true (Romans 6:21; 7:5). Instead of

being separate, the union with the false has produced an alliance of the temple of God with the temple of idols, an unequal yoke of believers and unbelievers, a fellowship of righteousness with unrighteousness, a communion of darkness with light, a concord of Christ with Belial, the believer and the infidel being partners. That such a thing is possible is absolute because twice in the New Testament our Lord said to his people concerning such a mixture, “Come out of her and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing.”

This war is about dealing with the effect that the world has on us, how its enticements are real. The result is always destructive. It is about our unbelief finding common ground with the infidel's unbelief. Remember a thing is not a temptation unless it finds responsiveness in us.

The remedy is clear. That which opposes God or causes us to offend is to be dealt with immediately and summarily (Matt. 5:28-30). In the Old Testament, the remedy is killing that which causes you to offend, but since the word of our Lord is clearly dealing with a matter of the heart (v. 28), immediate separation is the answer. Some would take this to mean that the believer is not to have anything to do with the infidel or that he or she is to break ties with family because they do not believe the truth. Paul sets this aright in 1 Cor. 5:9-10. For such we must pray and seek their salvation through the gospel. This war is about avenging the name of the Lord for the damage that has been done to us by our willful alliance with that which is false. The issue is the integrity of the gospel we believe.

If our relationships with the world do not cause us to compromise the gospel, those relationships are of no spiritual consequence. They are the natural results of being in this world. This war is the internal struggle with the elements of the world that are the source of the heart of our problem (2 Cor. 10:3-6). Our alliance with that which is false sets strongholds in us against what we know to be true, imaginations that have no basis in truth, and lofty things that exalt us against the knowledge of or what we know to

be true of God. What are these things that affect us, that find responsiveness in our hearts, that insult the gospel and must be avenged? They are against God and against what we know of God by the *gospel*.

What do we know to be true of God? We know that he has saved us *by* Christ alone. We know that he accepts us *in* Christ alone. We know that the righteousness that he *accepts* is the righteousness of Christ alone. We know that he has made us *complete* in Christ only. We know that the means of all of this coming to us is the *grace* of God through the gift of *faith* by the *preaching* of the gospel.

The world and its false religion entices us with the willingness found in our hearts to believe that we are more than what the scripture declares us to be. The strongholds that we erect are notions that we somehow have a part in our acceptance with God. We imagine that we have personal righteousness. Our assumed merit exalts us against the knowledge of God. When we see it, and know it, we are to kill it. How can we kill it?

How can we kill that which is born of our union with error? We cannot physically or spiritually remove it from ourselves. We must seek to remove ourselves from it. How? There is but one way and that is to *reckon* that what has affected us so horribly, has no basis for existence. How is that accomplished? It is by, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). None of these strongholds, imaginations and high things have any basis of our acceptance. Our righteousness, our acceptance, our salvation is the obedience of Christ *alone*. That is why this war in our text is led by the priest with his holy trumpets sounding out the charge. It is not Moses (the law) or Joshua (the warrior) that leads us to battle, but Christ the representative substitute, by whose obedience to the law and its penalty leads us to victory over the *imaginations* and *enticements* of our hearts.

Finally, we need to look at this tribute that was rendered to the Lord (v. 28). It was a percentage of the spoils that were attained by destroying the enemy, but also gained by allegiance with the enemy. What do we gain from our association with the enticements of the world? Primarily, we gain knowledge by experience. We learn that the enticements are followed because of our sin. We learn to be aware of that which is in us that responds to the world. We learn what we ought not to do. These are things that may be used for the glory of God. They may be a tribute to his forgiveness and grace.

The problem is that all our imaginations were acquired from, and born of, our illicit affair with Baal-peor. Our experience is tainted with the error that brought it about. It must pass through the fire and water of separation (Num. 19:9). If they do not pass through the fire and the water, they will become just another thing in which we can take pride, another way to build up the legend in our own mind.

The fire is *judgment* (v. 23). Our imaginations and enticements must not be judged as our experience of victory but as our affront to the gospel and only cleansed by the blood of Christ. They must not be a source of pride but rather a reminder of our shame. We would not have been made to slay them had we not first succumbed to their vile influence. We killed them because we, by grace and only by grace, were caused to see them in light of our standing before God.

They must also be washed with the water of separation (v. 23). The waters of separation are that water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer. This separation is not the cause of purification but the result of being pure by the sacrifice of Christ. All such things are to be viewed in the light of its effect on the gospel we believe. Seen thusly, our experience may then be a tribute to God's grace and used for the maintenance of the priesthood (believers) and the temple (the church, the body of Christ).

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Cor. 10:3-6).



LOVE NOT THE WORLD

Numbers 32

1, Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle;

2, The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying,

3, Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon,

4, Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle:

5, Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.

6, And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?

7, And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?

8, Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadeshbarnea to see the land.

9, For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them.

10, And the LORD'S anger was kindled the same time, and he swore, saying,

11, Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me:

12, Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD.

13, And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed.

14, And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the LORD toward Israel.

15, For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave them in the wilderness; and ye shall destroy all this people.

16, And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones:

17, But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land.

18, We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance.

19, For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward.

20, And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war,

21, And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him,

22, And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD.

23, But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

24, Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth.

25, And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth.

26, Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead:

27, But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, as my lord saith.

28, So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel:

29, And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the LORD, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession:

30, But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan.

31, And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, As the LORD hath said unto thy servants, so will we do.

32, We will pass over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours.

33, And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about.

34, And the children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer,

35, And Atroth, Shophan, and Jaazer, and Jogbehah,

36, And Bethnimrah, and Bethharan, fenced cities: and folds for sheep.

37, And the children of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Kirjathaim,

38, And Nebo, and Baalmeon, (their names being changed,) and Shibmah: and gave other names unto the cities which they builded.

39, And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it, and dispossessed the Amorite which was in it.

40, And Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein.

41, And Jair the son of Manasseh went and took the small towns thereof, and called them Havothjair.

42, And Nobah went and took Kenath, and the villages thereof, and called it Nobah, after his own name.

In this chapter is found one of the most well-known phrases in all of Christendom. It is a phrase that has been both used and abused for a varied list of reasons too numerous to account. In verse 23 we find the words, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” The basic and primal meaning of this phrase is real to every believer and makes us all wince a bit if we ponder it for just a moment. These words are a kind of detective that we need in our mind but often wish was not there. Even outside the context in which they are written, the phrase carries a somber weight and cannot be spoken without stirring something in us deep down where we live. They are simply, in and of themselves, true. “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

These words are spoken to the tribes of Ruben, Gad and 1/2 tribe of Manasseh concerning a promise they had made. The promise was made by these tribes because of a wretched choice they had made. These tribes had petitioned Moses and asked that they not be required to cross over Jordan and possess the land of promise. Rather, they would stay outside the promised land and give up the rights to their property in exchange for being allowed to stay in the area of Og and Bashan where there was great land for raising cattle. Seeing that they desired the land that God had cursed because of the children's mixture of Baal-peor with true worship, Moses, as it were, saw the handwriting on the wall.

Having reminded them of the end of those over twenty years of age (when they were delivered from Egypt) who were now carcasses in the wilderness, Moses confronted them with the inevitable result of not possessing the land that God had given them. Moses warned that after rebuilding the cities that God had them to destroy, housing their families and building up their cattle and sheep fortunes, they would in effect become the enemies of Israel if Israel was called to fight against the

countries in which they lived. Their answer was to promise to leave their wives and children behind and cross over Jordan with every man of war to fight on the side of Israel if ever necessary, and further promised not to return to their homes until the battle was won. This satisfied Moses and he allowed them to possess the land and not enter into the promised land.

I wonder what it did to Moses when he, who longed to enter the promised land but was not allowed because he sinned, saw these refuse to enter because they saw with their eyes the goodness of the land outside Canaan and refused to see as God saw. In effect, they despised the land that God had promised. It was in light of this promise that Moses said to these 2 ½ tribes, “Be sure your sins will find you out” if you fail to keep your promise. So, Ruben, Gad and ½ the tribe of Manasseh opted for a land other than that which God had given them.

Most Bible commentators leave the record there and deal with it only as historical fact. However, I am reminded of another such verse that carries with it an equally somber tone. Psalms 106:15 says, “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.” These tribes chose not to possess the promised land. What was the difference between them and those who refused it because of fear in Numbers 14? The only difference was the manifestation of *unbelief*. Those named in Numbers 14 would not go for *fear of men*, and those named in our text would not go for the promise of *earthly gain*. *Both* desired the wilderness. *Both* refused to enter the land of promise.

Remember, these were yet of the tribes of Israel, God's chosen race; Remember, the New Testament theme of Numbers is the words of 1 Cor. 10:11, “All these things happened to them for examples [types];” Remember, these tribes and their lives are a picture of Christ's Church in the world. In remembering all these things, this passage carries with it a disturbing truth and is under girded with a stern and sobering warning.

Think not that as a child of God you are exempt from such an example of unbelief. Think not that though you are chosen of God that you will refrain from giving up the enjoyment of your divine heritage for the gain of this world. The promised land was not only a place, it was the fruit gained by being in that place. To taste the land that flowed with milk and honey, the feast of fat things, the wine on the lees well refined, you had to be there. The land was the heritage of Ruben and Gad and Manasseh. God had given it to them, but they would never enjoy what was theirs because they chose what their eyes saw instead of what God had promised.

Their view was wide and horizontal instead of narrow and vertical. Their affections were set on things below rather than on the things above. They were looking at too many things instead of the one thing needful (Matthew 6:22-23). Salvation is not only the fact of it, the position that is the believer's, it is the enjoyment of it, the tasting of the grace of it. Sad as it is, the believer may choose to allow other believers to enjoy his portion because he has opted for the charms of this life and this world.

David's words in Psalm 51 are a prime example of this fact. He said, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Psalm 51:12). David belonged to God. He was a man after God's own heart. Yet in a moment of unbelief he fell into horrible sin beginning in adultery and ending in murder. He never ceased to be the child of God but he, because of a wretched choice, lost the joy of God's salvation.

Imagine for a moment you have mounted on eagle's wings and below you is the Jordan River. On one side is the promised land, occupied by the children of God rejoicing in the realized promise. On the other side are some of the children of God living in the riches of this world. On the one side are the songs of Zion, the worship of the Lord, the high priest. On the other side is the lyric of filthy lucre, no songs of Zion, only the discordant disharmonies of Baal-peor. On the one side is the testimony of God, on the

other side the testimony of man; the testimony that says “Yes, I am a child of God, but I have planted my roots in a foreign land.”

Ruben, Gad and Manasseh were merely a walk from the promised land, but their heart was a million miles away—so close yet so far away. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1).

The testimony of God is sure, and his warnings are to his people. Look to Paul's words of the first Corinthian letter, “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:29-31). Who is Paul speaking to? “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God *which is given you* by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3-4).

Look at the words of John in his first general epistle to the church. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Who is John speaking to? “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God

abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (vv. 1 John 2:12-14)

“Be sure your sins will find you out.”

Ruben, Gad and Manasseh stopped short of the promise and forfeited the right of realizing the joy that attended the promise. As the eagle sees, these have a name that designates them as a child of God. They defend the name of God and, will die for the cause of God, but their *testimony* is that they love this present world (Rev. 3:1-6).

Consider these tribes. See them for who they are, the place they hold in God's heritage, the choice they made, and pray God to forbid us shirking it off as if it did not apply to us. This can be our story if God allows. Their promise, their life and their end are a chronicle of the believer who has planted his roots on the shifting sand of this world.

Three things:

1. Their promise (vv. 17-19). They promised to defend what they refused to enjoy. They promised to fight for what they refused to be a part of. It is a good thing to fight for what is right. But it is suspect if you fight for what is right so you can possess what is wrong. Our Lord said that if his kingdom were of this world then his children would fight for it. These tribes did not fight for the promised land because they loved it; they fought for it so they could have what they wanted in this world. In this they were mercenaries. The defense of the gospel is for Immanuel's Land, not for geographical, political or worldly gain. If you do not enjoy the salvation that God purchased for you, but yet fight for it while grasping this world, your warring is suspect.

How many have foregone the fellowship of the church for thousands of reasons, yet staunchly defend the doctrine of God. How many have isolated themselves for the kine of Bashan who will yet fight tooth and nail for the Doctrine of Christ. I am thankful for their defense of the gospel but wonder why they refuse the enjoyment of the fruits that attend

the gathering of God people. It is a sad thing to have a brother or sister with whom there can be no fellowship because they are on the other side of Jordan. We would say to such; “Cross on over Jordan, die to that other world, come and dine—this is your land also—your inheritance.”

It is suspect to fight for what you refuse to enjoy. What testimony do you really have if you by choice have come short of the promise? Nicodemus is a New Testament example. Whether he was a believer or not, I do not know. Most commentators believe that he was because he defended Christ (John 7:50). The defense seems a little lame, and there is no indication that when he was pressed to confess Christ (John 7:48) that he did. It simply states that he dispersed as did the rest of the bunch. Nicodemus has always been known in scripture as the one who came to Jesus by night (John 7:50; 19:39), and we know what Christ said about such (John 3:2, 19-20). He did anoint Christ for burial after he had died, implying that he loved Christ, but he never openly confessed him for fear of the Jews. By all indicators, if he was a disciple of Christ, he made his camp on the wrong side of the Jordan. Proximity to the promise is not realizing the promise. Defending the promise is not enjoying the promise.

2. Their life. These tribes kept their promise to fight but gained their wealth and prosperity outside the land of Canaan. With such choices, there will ultimately come a time when the one who made the wretched choice will have to justify what he did. There is no escaping this. The world is not stupid, nor are the children of God. If the life you live appears as if you have no interest in the things of God, yet you are willing to defend the truth, sooner or later your belief is going to be called into question. You have opted for that which cannot be defended or justified by your life.

What will such a one do? He will boast of his Christianity and that in a big and visible way. Look at Joshua 22:10; “And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of

Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a *great* altar to *see* to.”

These 2 ½ tribes did not just build an altar; they built a *big one*—one that could be seen by those on the Canaan side of the Jordan. It was as if they were saying, “We know we don't have anything to do with you folks, but we are still believers—see how big our altar is. We don't come to worship with you, but we have cottage prayer meetings and teach the truth. We refuse to enjoy the promise with the children of God, but we preach, teach and defend the gospel of Grace.”

I'm sorry; God is worshipped in the promised land and nowhere else. The high priest is there, the altar is there, the ceremony is there and nowhere else (Joshua 22:11-19). Christ is in the midst of his Church (Rev. 1:10-13). The big altar does not wash. They have come short of the promise. “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

3. Their end. Joshua 21:38 reads as follows, “And out of the tribe of Gad, *Ramoth in Gilead* with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Mahanaim with her suburbs.” Ramoth in Gilead was the possession of the tribe of Gad. When war came to Israel in 1 Kings, those who encamped and made their homes short of the promise were the first to fall (1 Kings 22:1-3). “Be sure your sins will find you out.” (See: Genesis 44:16; Isaiah 59:12; Psalm 51:3-4).

This chapter in Numbers is a somber warning to the children of God. Finally,

19, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20, But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21, For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22, The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23, But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

24, No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26, Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27, Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28, And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29, And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30, Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31, Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32, (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33, But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34, Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Mathew 6:19-34).



PROVIDENTIAL CARE

Numbers 33-34

Numbers 33:1, These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

2, And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out.

3, And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians.

4, For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments.

5, And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth.

6, And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness.

7, And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pihahiroth, which is before Baalzephon: and they pitched before Migdol.

8, And they departed from before Pihahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah.

9, And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim: and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they pitched there.

10, And they removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red sea.

11, And they removed from the Red sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin.

12, And they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah.

13, And they departed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush.

14, And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink.

15, And they departed from Rephidim, and pitched in the wilderness of Sinai.

16, And they removed from the desert of Sinai, and pitched at Kibrothhattaavah.

17, And they departed from Kibrothhattaavah, and encamped at Hazeroth.

18, And they departed from Hazeroth, and pitched in Rithmah.

19, And they departed from Rithmah, and pitched at Rimmonparez.

20, And they departed from Rimmonparez, and pitched in Libnah.

21, And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah.

22, And they journeyed from Rissah, and pitched in Kehelathah.

23, And they went from Kehelathah, and pitched in mount Shapher.

24, And they removed from mount Shapher, and encamped in Haradah.

25, And they removed from Haradah, and pitched in Makheloth.

26, And they removed from Makheloth, and encamped at Tahath.

27, And they departed from Tahath, and pitched at Tarah.

28, And they removed from Tarah, and pitched in Mithcah.

29, And they went from Mithcah, and pitched in Hashmonah.

30, And they departed from Hashmonah, and encamped at Moseroth.

31, And they departed from Moseroth, and pitched in Benejaakan.

32, And they removed from Benejaakan, and encamped at Horhagidgad.

33, And they went from Horhagidgad, and pitched in Jotbathah.

34, And they removed from Jotbathah, and encamped at Ebronah.

35, And they departed from Ebronah, and encamped at Eziongaber.

36, And they removed from Eziongaber, and pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh.

37, And they removed from Kadesh, and pitched in mount Hor, in the edge of the land of Edom.

38, And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month.

39, And Aaron was an hundred and twenty and three years old when he died in mount Hor.

40, And king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.

41, And they departed from mount Hor, and pitched in Zalmonah.

42, And they departed from Zalmonah, and pitched in Punon.

43, And they departed from Punon, and pitched in Oboth.

44, And they departed from Oboth, and pitched in Ijeabarim, in the border of Moab.

45, And they departed from Iim, and pitched in Dibongad.

46, And they removed from Dibongad, and encamped in Almondiblathaim.

47, And they removed from Almondiblathaim, and pitched in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo.

48, And they departed from the mountains of Abarim, and pitched in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.

49, And they pitched by Jordan, from Bethjesimoth even unto Abelshittim in the plains of Moab.

50, And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,

51, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

52, Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:

53, And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.

54, And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.

55, But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

56, Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.

Numbers 34:1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof:)

3, Then your south quarter shall be from the wilderness of Zin along by the coast of Edom, and your south border shall be the outmost coast of the salt sea eastward:

4, And your border shall turn from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim, and pass on to Zin: and the going forth thereof shall be from the south to Kadeshbarnea, and shall go on to Hazaraddar, and pass on to Azmon:

5, And the border shall fetch a compass from Azmon unto the river of Egypt, and the goings out of it shall be at the sea.

6, And as for the western border, ye shall even have the great sea for a border: this shall be your west border.

7, And this shall be your north border: from the great sea ye shall point out for you mount Hor:

8, From mount Hor ye shall point out your border unto the entrance of Hamath; and the goings forth of the border shall be to Zedad:

9, And the border shall go on to Ziphron, and the goings out of it shall be at Hazarenan: this shall be your north border.

10, And ye shall point out your east border from Hazarenan to Shepham:

11, And the coast shall go down from Shepham to Riblah, on the east side of Ain; and the border shall descend, and shall reach unto the side of the sea of Chinnereth eastward:

12, And the border shall go down to Jordan, and the goings out of it shall be at the salt sea: this shall be your land with the coasts thereof round about.

13, And Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying, This is the land which ye shall inherit by lot, which the LORD commanded to give unto the nine tribes, and to the half tribe:

14, For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received their inheritance; and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance:

15, The two tribes and the half tribe have received their inheritance on this side Jordan near Jericho eastward, toward the sunrising.

16, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

17, These are the names of the men which shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun.

18, And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance.

19, And the names of the men are these: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

20, And of the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud.

21, Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon.

22, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Dan, Bukki the son of Jogli.

23, The prince of the children of Joseph, for the tribe of the children of Manasseh, Hanniel the son of Ephod.

24, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Ephraim, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan.

25, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Zebulun, Elizaphan the son of Parnach.

26, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Issachar, Paltiel the son of Azzan.

27, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Asher, Ahihud the son of Shelomi.

28, And the prince of the tribe of the children of Naphtali, Pedahel the son of Ammihud.

29, These are they whom the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance unto the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.

At first glance, these two chapters seem little more than an historical record of where the Lord led the people while they were in the wilderness and the setting of their boundaries when they were about to possess the promised land. They are indeed that, but they are much more. Since “all scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness; that the man of God be thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” then these chapters are more than just an historical account.

Further, since the people of God are ordained to good works that they should walk in them, these scriptures are designed to thoroughly furnish us to that end by teaching us doctrine, reproving, correcting and instructing us. We also know that all the scriptures testify of Christ, and all good works are by him, pertaining both to accomplishment as well as motivation. These passages then, as all others, do not lend themselves to cursory reading or categorizing as something that can be lightly scanned. It is our privilege, having been given the spirit of discernment, to search these things, to meditate upon them and pray the Spirit of truth will show us Christ and his work in them because he is most assuredly here.

We know by our previous studies and the clear declaration of the New Testament that these wilderness journeys are a picture of the church in the world to this very hour. So, these chapters are about our history and about our boundaries as we move to realize the full extent and value of what has already been possessed for us. There is an old adage that says, “God is in the details.” These two chapters are full of details, and the extent to which God inspired Moses to record the details is quite amazing. *Every* place to where the people were led is recorded. The *exact* boundaries were declared in minute exactness.

As we consider this exacting account and the rigorous accuracy displayed, the first thing to consider is that God remembered every aspect and left it for us to study. These steps and direction of this people were of great importance to God. I am reminded of Psalm 139:1-18. How precious, indeed, are God's thoughts toward his people! The overriding themes of these two chapters are the providential care for the church in the world and the boundaries that God has set for his church in the world.

With the intricately detailed account of the people removing from one place and pitching in another, our Lord records 40 years of a nomadic journey. We know several things about this journey. Its primary objective

was to do away with all those men who were over twenty years old when Israel was delivered from Egypt because they refused to believe God.

Also, with this repetitive account of moving and pitching camp, we must remember that it happened according to the movement of the cloud that covered them by day and the trump that sounded. The cloud not only pictured their protection from the heat of trials but also pictured the reason for their protection; their sins had been blotted out like a thick cloud. It also pictured the church at rest until they were instructed to move. The world, it's religion, and even the believer sometimes has trouble with the principle of waiting for the cloud to move. We often feel guilty because in times of stasis we feel we ought to be about some sort of business. We learn by reproof and correction that when we leave before the cloud moves, we get the sunburn of disobedience. It is best we wait upon the Lord, trusting we will be moved soon enough, and know that if we abide under the cloud in patience, the cloud will also be our protection on the journey. The trump, of course, represented the gospel which also pictured the call to move to the next place God would have them go. This all pictures God's providential care for his people. Look at Deuteronomy 2:7 and 8:4.

2:7, For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God *hath been* with thee; thou hast lacked nothing

8:4, Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

Would to God that we might believe that every step we take is a lesson, every moving an instruction in righteousness, every pitching a reproof and correction, every footprint in the sand a sovereign furnishing for the work

involved in what lies ahead. The journey through this world may seem like a maze. Often, we may ask why we have been made to pass a certain way or stop where we seem unwelcome, but Scripture declares, in no uncertain terms, that the steps of the good man are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 85:13; [conversely] Proverbs. 16:9; Jeremiah 10:23). Divine providence assures that we have never been and will never be the victim of circumstance.

We do not know what tomorrow brings but we know who will bring it if it comes. Nothing can be laid as a charge against us. No one can condemn us. We will, for the most part, go unnoticed by the world but not by God. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” Look at

Psalm 56:8, “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”

Has your estate brought you to tears? Look at

Psalm 39:12, “Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.”

and

2 Kings 20:5, “Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

Consider the precise details of the movements of the people in this passage, and know that there are no accidents when it comes to the child of God. Rehearse in your mind until it becomes the theme of your often-troubled soul the words of 1 Peter 5:7, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

The second overriding theme in chapters 33 and 34 are the boundaries that God has set for the promised land. Certainly, a case could be made for the numerous restrictions that God has placed on his people; adultery, fornication, drunkenness, religious activity for public display, personal reward and such. That, however, is *not* the theme that is set forth in these chapters. These boundaries are set to teach us that the church is hedged about from the enemies of the truth. We are as Solomon said, “A garden enclosed.” No weapon that is formed against us shall prosper.

The boundaries set are the perimeters of the city of God. The walls are made of the iron of impenetrable purpose. The gates are made of the brass of satisfied justice. The atmosphere is the ether of immutable love. The church is in the hand of Christ, Christ's hand is enwrapped in the hand of God, and no force of heaven or hell may penetrate these omnipotent fists, or loosen their sovereign grasp. Have you possessed the land? Fear not, you are protected by the boundaries that God has established, and in this land, all things work together for your good. Inside this blessed boundary, all things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

There is something else here that is unspoken but proven by Biblical history. The people never spread to all the distance of the boundaries that God had set. On earth they never realized the fullness of the promise. It was theirs but they never expanded the breadth and width of it. We look through a glass darkly. Our vision is dimmed by our own unbelief. Our afflictions often tie us to the world. Paul said, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

One day, not far hence, we will spread to the farthest outpost of Immanuel's Land. It is the land that God has given us. He has drawn the boundaries, and they consist of the new heavens and the new earth. When the cataracts of unbelief are excised from our corrupted corneas and we can read our title clear, we will fully and freely possess the land to its utmost boundaries.

These are the two overriding principles taught in these chapters. Wherever you find an overriding principle in scripture, there will also be found an under-girding truth. As these passages were written under the inspiration of God for reproof, correction and instruction, they were first and foremost written for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16). There are, in these chapters, three under-girding doctrines which are the foundation for the providential care and protection that God gives his people and their enjoyment of it. The three are *substitution*, *representation* and *separation*.

1. Substitution (Numbers 33:2-3). The journeys of this people began after the blood of the Paschal lamb was shed (Exodus 12:2). On the morrow, after the Lord has passed over *you* in judgment, the Lord God having accepted the blood of the Lamb as payment for your sin, your month begins, your year begins, your life begins and your journey in this world begins under the protection of divine providence. Until then, nothing works for your good. You are a slave to the religion of Egypt, ruled over by Satan, sin and self. You are a slave to your own lusts and the desires of the flesh. But when the blood is applied to your house, the chains fall off, the heart is freed, and life begins (your birthday). As a possession purchased by God with his own blood, you are not your own; you are bought with a price. God is your God and you are his people.

Enveloped in his indestructible love you leave the slavery of Egypt with a "high hand" (Ex. 11:7; 12:33). You walked out of Egypt fearless under the protection of sovereign providence because God had punished sin wherever he found it. He exacted blood at every house, and the blood

he exacted at your house was the blood of the substitute, Christ our passover slain for us.

The words “high hand” in the original means “with power to worship acceptably.” I think it is interesting to note that the definition of highhanded in *today's* dictionary is “arrogant or overbearing.” Most who preach and believe the gospel, asserting their salvation began with Christ, ends with Christ, involves being chosen to it, having been predestinated to it and particularly redeemed by the blood of intent, are often called arrogant and overbearing. This deliverance of Israel was predestinated before they were even a people, except in the redemptive purpose of God (Genesis 15:13-14). No wonder that they came out with a “high hand;” their salvation began with God, was accomplished by God and will be consummated by God.

2. Representation (Numbers 33:38). The providential care and protection that God affords his people cannot be based on an earthly high priest. The high priest Aaron died in the fortieth year. Though Eleazar was appointed in his place, he too would die because the Levitical priesthood was occupied by temporal, dying men. They were the best of men, but that means they were only men at their best. The protection that is afforded the church must be by the representation of an undying High Priest (Hebrews 7:11-28; 4:14-16).

3. Separation (Numbers 33:50-56). In the land of promise there can be no tolerance of false worship. There can be no quarter given to the false even for the sake of peace, but this does not mean that we are to go on a witch hunt for tares among the wheat. That will be taken care of by God at the final harvest when he will separate the tares from the wheat and bundle the tares to be burned. This means that we, in our worship of God, must not countenance any practice, message or method that even hints of anything that exalts man or diminishes God. If we do, it will be as pricks in our eyes, thorns in our sides and a vexation to our habitation. The

warning is clear, (v. 56; Rev. 2:5, 14:15, 20-23). Once again, we are reminded of the necessity of refusing the mixture of the false and the true (2 Cor 6:14-18).

The providential care and protection of God's people are conditioned upon *substitution* and *representation* and they are realized and enjoyed by *separation*.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

REFUGE!

Numbers 35

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,

2, Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them.

3, And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts.

4, And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.

5, And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits; and the city shall be in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities.

6, And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities.

7, So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs.

8, And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth.

9, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

10, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

11, Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.

12, And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.

13, And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.

14, Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.

15, These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.

16, And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

17, And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

18, Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

19, The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.

20, But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;

21, Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.

22, But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

23, Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm:

24, Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:

25, And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.

26, But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;

27, And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

28, Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.

29, So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

30, Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

31, Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

32, And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

33, So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

34, Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

This lesson marks the end of our study of the book of Numbers. Though there is one more chapter, it has already been dealt with in our study on chapter 27. Next we will begin on the book of Deuteronomy which means “second law.” That book is not truly a second set of laws but a second, more in depth, interpretation of the laws that have already been given and that apply to the life of the child of God as he takes up residence in the land of Canaan.

This final look at the book of Numbers is a sweet reiteration of the gospel as these six cities of refuge picture Christ as the refuge of guilty ignorant sinners, fleeing for their life from the rightful claims of the law for their death.

There are those who mistakenly interpret scripture from an eschatological format. In other words, their interpretation of the word of God begins with the notion that they must make it fit their idea of the end

times. Many who hold to the most prevalent view, that of premillennialism, assert that the Bible teaches a physical restoration of the nation of Israel at the end of time, complete with the rebuilding of the temple, the resumption of the priesthood, the reintroduction of sacrifices and the Messiah sitting of the literal throne of David.

Those holding this view interpret the cities of refuge to be *that restoration* of natural Israel. They hold that Christ is the man who was slain by accident, and the Jews were the manslayer. Since they did this slaying in ignorance, supported by the words of Christ from the cross, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” they are now kept in providential care (the city of refuge) until Christ resumes the throne of king and priest. Then, what they had lost being in that city, they will then be able to reclaim. They further assert that certain things about the manslayer may not be applied to the believer who has fled to Christ.

First and foremost is that a believer cannot leave Christ, and the manslayer may leave the city of refuge albeit to his own harm. Secondly, the manslayer may rightly be judged and slain if he leaves the city, and this cannot speak of the believer because he was already judged in Christ on Calvary. These are reasonable assertions, but they rely wholly on the premise that the Bible is interpreted on the foundation of an eschatological position. The Bible is not interpreted in that manner. The Bible is interpreted by Christ. It is about Christ and his work for the satisfaction of God and the welfare of his elect (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44-45; Romans 15:4; 2 John 5:9-13).

We know the Old Testament scriptures are the testimony of Christ in types, shadows and pictures. We have seen that the book of Numbers is about Christ and his church in the world. The New Testament declares these things were recorded for us as examples and warning concerning belief and unbelief. However, no type, picture, or shadow is ever a full representation of the substance. A picture is two dimensional. It is on a flat

plane and requires the skill of the artist to add shadow and light to make it appear to have depth and dimension. You cannot turn the picture sideways and see anything more than a flat piece of paper. Even so-called 3D pictures are but optical illusions that play on the inability of the brain to view two opposing colors at the same time. The illusion of dimension occurs with the brain's constant shifting from one color to another and thus, by confusion, creating the illusion of depth. This is a three-dimensional world.

Old Testament pictures are two dimensional. They are shadow and not substance. To see Christ as he is from looking at the picture, a third dimension must be in place. That dimension is the spiritual and is only seen by God given faith. Thus, “faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.”

Having said that, we must see the picture displayed by the cities of refuge in light of the spiritual truth they are teaching. Without any arduous efforts at systematically wringing out every aspect that is involved here, there is a single overwhelming lesson that is taught. To get to that lesson several things are set before us. We have before us, 1. the sin, 2. the offended law, 3. the sinner, 4. the gospel preacher's duty, 5. the refuge, 6. the death of the High priest, 7. the warning, and 8. the overriding truth.

This passage, though containing the doctrine of grace, is more about the *experience* of grace. We find once again that the placement of a thing in the Holy Writ is astoundingly appropriate. Here, at the end of the journey, after the children of God have sojourned in this world and are about to enter the promised land, we have before us a wonderful reminder that with all our experiences taken into account, with all the manifestations of the gospel and the precise providential dealings of our most gracious God with us, we end with the beginning. For the believer, having long been cared for by God, having been delivered from the bondage of Egypt and about to cross Jordan into the land flowing with milk and honey, the

message is still simply and succinctly, “With all speed and determination, flee to the savior!”

1. The Sin. The sin is manslaughter. It is not murder because the context makes it clear that a murderer is to die for his sin (v. 16). The result of the crime is not less heinous. A person has been killed, a life has been taken and thus the law has been broken. This crime however is one of mitigating circumstance. There was no malice afore thought and there was no premeditation. There was however the breaking of the law.

What is being taught is a singular principle. Sin is sin though it may be committed unwittingly. The fact is, all that we as sinners can do is sin. Everything we do, think or practice is corrupted with our own flesh and flows through the law of sin in us (Romans 7:18-24). Herein, we see the grace of God and the tenderness with which he views his elect. He views their sin with an eye on the remedy (Ps. 103:9-14). God does not count the sin any less worthy of death. His requirement for justice is not assuaged because of concept of intent. Sin requires death, no matter what the extenuating circumstances surrounding it. His holy law demands death.

2. The offended Law. The avenger of death represents the offended law. The law of God is exacting in its judgment. Everyone is guilty, and the result of a sinner dealing with the law or the law dealing with any sinner, on any level, is death (Romans 3:19-20). The sin is that the law has been broken, and the death of the offender must ensue. There are no exceptions to this immutable principle. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The law is right and true in its judgments. It is holy and just and rightfully requires the death of the law breaker. You and I, and everyone who sins (and all do) will and must suffer the penalty of the law. Do not be deceived, sin will not go unpunished. From the moment of our birth, we unwittingly come forth from the womb speaking lies. As soon as we draw our first breath the sword of unyielding, inflexible justice hangs over us as the pall of sure execution.

3. The sinner. The sinner is the manslayer. This is where we see that this is about the *experience of grace*. Though the sinner has slain a man unwittingly, he is yet aware of the fact that he has done it. This reveals that this man is *aware* of his sin. He knows that he is a sinner. One man said, “The sinner is a sacred thing the Holy Ghost has made him so.” One may give generic and mental assent to his lack of perfection, or his bent to err, but no man knows his sin is worthy of eternal damnation but by the revelation of God. He knows it because, by the preaching of the gospel, he hears the fast footsteps of the avenger of blood gaining on him (Romans 7:7-14).

4. The refuge (vv. 11-14). Behold the mercy and grace of God. He has established six cities of refuge. Three on each side of the Jordan. Three inside the promised land and three on the other side of Jordan. Three for those who enjoy what God has provided for them, and three for those who have foregone the fellowship and enjoyment of the promise land having opted for the gain of the world. No matter the spiritual estate, no matter how far you may have drifted from the enjoyment of what God has provided for you, within your reach is the city of refuge.

Christ is that city. He is our refuge, for every child of God (Ps. 9:9; 46:1, 7; 62:7-8; Heb. 6:18-20). Get to him, and you are safe and secure from the rights that the law has over you—the death that is due your crimes (Romans 6:14). Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh unto you. He is not far from us for in him we live and move and have our being. In that city no harm can come to you. The avenger of blood cannot enter (Romans 8:38-39).

5. The gospel preacher's duty (Deut. 19:3). The roads to the cities of refuge were tended by men assigned to keep the way clean. Signs were erected that pointed to the cities with the words “refuge, refuge” printed on them. The roads were to be kept smooth and all means of stumbling were to be removed. *Nothing* was to be a hindrance to the manslayer

having access to the city. This is the duty of the pastor, the gospel preacher. He is to point to the city. He is to remove any hindrance or stumbling block between the sinner and the savior. His message is plain and unencumbered with religious notions, ceremony, law, personal convictions; all of which can take a man's eyes off the city (Isaiah 40:1-9). "Behold the Lamb of God."

6. The death of the high priest (vv. 25, 28). Once the manslayer had reached the security of the city of refuge, he was to remain there until the high priest died. At the death of the high priest, he could be returned to his home and all that he had left behind. This teaches several things.

It teaches that the *person* and *work* of Christ cannot be separated. In Christ, the believer is secure, and all who are in Christ were in him from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-4). Those in Christ by purpose were made free from the penalty of the law, restored of all they lost and much more when Christ died (Hebrews 9:12-17). The death of the person secures the release and restoration of the sinner. The liberty of the believer is blood bought. The man slayer had to leave all for the sake of his life. House and home, family and friends nor anything else could be of any value to him if he wanted to live. He had to leave it all behind for the city, but when the high priest died, he was free to come and go. (Mark 10:28-30; John 10:9).

7. The warning (vv. 26-28). We know that a person who is in Christ cannot ever be lost. This is the clear declaration of scripture. What then is this warning? It is simple. There is no safety *outside* of Christ. Outside of Christ is the avenger of blood and a myriad of ways to die. The only safe place is *in* the city of refuge.

8. Finally, the overriding truth. Make haste! Move with all diligence and speed. Flee to the city of refuge. Flee to the secure arms of the savior. Put forth every fiber of your energy to be found behind the walls of this sacred precinct. Do not wait for a bolt of lightning. Do not fold your arms

and fatalistically wait for a sign. Consider noting but your life. Do not muse as to whether you were meant to be delivered. Sinners in need and under threat do not countenance such frivolous things. Their words are simple, “I must have Christ, or I die.” Flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

Matthew 11:12, And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

This is the final word for the church in the world—Flee to Christ!



