

INTRODUCTION

Why “Numbers”?

What’s in a name? I have read somewhere about commercial fishermen who had scant market for their catch. It was not until the fish could be sold under the name ‘Tuna’ that ‘Horse Mackerel’ really began to sell.

The name of this book, “Numbers,” is about as intriguing and exciting as the title of an income tax form. ¹ Perhaps a more descriptive name would be “The Long Way Home,” for the high water mark of its message is Kadesh-barnea where thirty-eight years (Deut. 2:14) were added to the eleven-day (Deut. 1:2) march to the land of promise.

The book both opens and closes with a lengthy and detailed census. This stirs our interest about as much as a couple of chapters of genealogy. Also, because of the great magnitude of the numbers recorded, they pose what seems to be a great challenge to the accuracy, and very inspiration, of the entire passage.

Why, then, study this book?

It will stretch our faith to the glory point. It will yield types of Christ and of our salvation, sanctification and assurance. It will demonstrate the supreme ability of God to guide and provide for His own, His faithfulness both to chasten and reward His people, and the certainty that what He has promised He is able also to fulfill.

This book is rich in typology and illustrations of vital New Testament material. John 3:14 – 16 and Hebrews 9:13 rest on events related only in Numbers. The necessary background for a full understanding of Acts seven, Heb. 6:4 – 8 and Heb. 10:26 – 31, 39 is found in Numbers thirteen and fourteen.

When Paul said, “Now these things happened to them as an example [“type”], and they were written for our learning upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11 - NKJV), ² he had chiefly in mind this very book of Numbers.

We will not linger long over passages awaiting the tedious and exhaustive work of the scholar, though doubtless they contain many hidden gems of truth. With, regrettably, no knowledge of Hebrew we will attempt to seek out those spiritual truths that may, by prayerful and careful study, with attention to rightly dividing the word of

¹ The Hebrew title of the book is “In the Wilderness,” because it records what took place there. – Companion Bible.

² Scripture quotations will be from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted. Occasional reference will be made to the King James Version (KJV) and the .New American Standard Bible (NASB). It is strongly suggested that each passage under discussion be prayerfully read before the study is begun, and that a Bible be nearby for checking references noted.

truth, be harvested from existing translations and helps – truths that are ripe for the picking. Our aim is not to deeply analyze the bread of life – but, hopefully, to serve it to those who are hungry, who will enjoy it and share it with others.

As in the entire Old Testament, the prevailing theme of the book is God's relationship to Israel as a nation. As early as Gen. 15:13 – 16 God promised to bring them out of a time of slavery in a land that was not theirs, even stating the time they would be oppressed there.³ The promise was not to certain individuals, or even a class of individuals, but to the nation fathered by Abraham. Though the generation starting out for Palestine failed almost totally to arrive, God's promise that the *nation* was to enter that land was fully and gloriously carried out by the succeeding generation. The personal salvation of those involved is not in question. Among the "rebels" who perished before they could enter the land there were doubtless many that were personally justified before God. After all, the number included Miriam, Aaron and even Moses himself.

As is the case in the rest of the Old Testament, the salvation of individuals is clearly in focus from time to time. However that topic is secondary here to the overriding theme of God's program and future prospects for the nation that He had early called "My son" (Ex. 4:22). Above all else may we see ever more clearly the things concerning Christ, God's "Only Begotten Son," in this book (Luke 24:27).

The Background for the Narrative Before Us

When Abraham first viewed the land to which God had called him God said to him, "To your descendants I will give this land" (Gen. 12:7).

One major problem existed – the land was already in the possession of the Canaanites (Gen. 12:6). Nevertheless God assured him that the entire area was to be given to him and his descendants (Gen. 13:14 – 17). During his lifetime Abraham never enjoyed full possession of that which had been promised to him (Heb. 11:13). God even told him that for 400 years his descendants would be entirely removed to a land that was not theirs (Gen. 15:13). The problem, again, was the Canaanites. They were wicked, and would one day be judged for their wickedness and dispossessed of their homeland, but the time for that had not yet arrived. God was patiently waiting until their cup of iniquity would be full – until they fully deserved the total destruction that would be meted out through Israel's invasion (Gen. 15:16).

During the long years in Egypt the Israelites must have known of the revelation made to Abraham. When Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones he told his brothers, "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). What Joseph told his

³ The seeming contradiction between Gen. 15:13 and Acts 7:6, on the one hand, and Ex. 12:40 on the other is easily explained. The children of Israel were *residents* of Egypt for 430 years, but they were *enslaved and oppressed* for only 400 years. This tells us that between their arrival in Egypt and the time when a new king arose who knew not Joseph (Ex. 1:8) was 30 years.

brothers had been “by faith” (Heb. 11:22). He was not merely longing for their welfare – he knew what God had promised to Abraham and he believed it!

As their slavery became ever more bitter how greatly Israel must have longed for that coming deliverance! How slowly the long years must have dragged by! As the predicted time of their departure drew near they must have begun looking for the coming of the deliverer. Then Moses came on the scene and tried to alleviate their suffering (Ex. 2:11 – 14) – but he was forty years early and serving, at that time, under the wrong master. He failed to even make a dent in the plight of his brethren and had to flee to the backside of the desert (Ex. 2:15). He had spent forty years in Pharaoh’s court learning to be ‘somebody,’ now he spent forty years in the desert learning to be ‘nobody’ (Ex. 3:11) so that he might become a fitting tool in the hands of God to deliver everybody.

Finally the time is right. The specified four hundred years have almost run their course and, behold, Moses is back. This time he has come as the humble servant of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Rapidly now earth-shaking events take place. Pharaoh’s gods are defeated, his power is challenged and broken, his people are judged and, finally, his army is destroyed. The Passover has righted their relationship with God and the crossing of the Red Sea sets them free from the tyranny of Pharaoh. They are given bread from heaven and water from the Rock. They gain their first military victory, which presages those to come. They are granted a covenant with God and have His instructions as to how they are to live pleasing to him. They have a penal system to keep sin in check and a sacrificial system to care for its guilt before God. They also have a tabernacle, making it possible for God to dwell among them and go before them. They have even been instructed as to how they are to conduct themselves in the land. Now, as they are poised only an eleven days journey from the land of milk and honey that Israel has been looking forward to for four hundred years, their anticipation is surely at fever pitch. They could have been singing, as one hymn puts it, I “nightly pitch my tent a day’s march nearer home!”⁴

At this moment of high drama and glorious expectation we open the book of Numbers.

⁴ Hymn # 48 in “The Believers Hymn Book” – Pickering & Inglis, London.

THE LONG WAY HOME

I thank God, first of all, for His wonderful Word and for His Holy Spirit who seeks to open our eyes to its truth. Whatever is of value, whatever delights the mind and feeds the soul in this volume, must have come forth as He patiently led and enabled the author, working in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

The Lord saw fit to use several people to help produce this book. I am grateful to a dear brother in Christ, Bruce Menconi, who gave me no peace, as he insisted I should put in writing some of the truths we discussed together. Two Medical Doctors were, I am sure, instruments in God's hands to give me time to do the writing, when they used their dedicated surgical skills to save my life.

Most of all, the patient care, loving encouragement, and faithful intercession of my wife, Eunice Heath, has made it possible to carry on this project – and I most wholeheartedly dedicate this book to her.

-- William P Heath

THE CENSUS

(Numbers Chapter One)

The Magnitude of the Israelitish Host

How astonishing are the miracles recorded in the book of Exodus! Among them we read of the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the cloud and pillar of fire, the manna, water from the rock, Moses existing forty days without food or water, etc. The book of Numbers records additional miracles, and relates in detail what may be the greatest miracle of all, the successful journey of an almost countless multitude across the wilderness for forty years. The logistics involved in such a migration constitute it an outstanding miracle of God

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt he had such a vast assembly following him that it staggers the imagination. The careful census taken in the opening chapters of Numbers yields a total of 603,550 men "from twenty years old and upward, all able to go forth to war" (Num. 1:3). This did not include the 22,000 Levites (Num. 1:47; 3:39) nor the women and children. This was just the army. The total expedition probably numbered some two million people.

Amazingly the entire host, including possessions and cattle (Ex. 12:32, 38), was under the leadership of just one man. In addition, Moses, at the outset, had no revealed organization. He also had no public address system, printing press, telephone or other device, such as we find so necessary today, to aid him in communicating with his people. The topography of the land traversed is thought by some to rule out such a large wilderness "church" (Acts 7:38 - KJV). Others cite the extended time it would take for such activities as the Red Sea crossing, breaking up and reestablishing camps, the formation of their line of march, and so on, as reasons for ruling out such a large company.

All of these considerations pose such an 'impossible' situation that we may hesitate to face it squarely. How can this problem be resolved?

Are the statistics in the text in error? Surely not, for we are not faced with only a verse or two, which could be imagined to have suffered from 'corruption of the manuscripts.' Nearly an entire chapter is taken up with precise particulars of the census. Actually, the detailed accounting continues on through the first four chapters of Numbers. In addition, another census was taken some thirty-eight years later in which the army of 601,730 men (Num. 26:51) was almost as large as that in chapter one.

At the time of the Exodus Egypt was already a world power -- yet the Israelites were so numerous that, even though they were evidently untrained and unarmed, the Egyptians believed they posed a significant military threat (Ex. 1:7 – 10; Psa. 105:24). Pharaoh tried to counter this burgeoning Jewish population by treating them harshly, even attempting a form of genocide for a time (Ex. 1:15 – 19). "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they [the Egyptians] were in dread of the children of Israel" (Ex. 1:12).

The massive size of the exodus is further substantiated in other references scattered through the text. Moses complained that the responsibility for caring for such a host was too much for

him to handle (Num. 11:11, 12, 14). In the same chapter he confirms that the census was correct by reaffirming the number of warriors involved (Num. 11:21). When he questioned how meat could be supplied for such a host (Num. 11:22), God asked a question that could well be posed concerning the whole problem of the vast encampment. “Is the LORD’S power limited?” He then declared, “Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not” (Num. 11:23 - NASB). *It did!*

Later Balak feared Israel because “they were many” (Num. 22:3) and covered the surface of the earth (Num. 22:5). When Balaam prophesied to Balak he asked, “Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel?” (Num. 23:10). Moses, at the close of the 40 years in the wilderness, said, “The LORD your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude” (Deut. 1:10). Marveling at the growth of the nation over a period of some 400 years he added, “Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven” (Deut. 10:22 - NASB).

Also, the size of their camp is intimated in one passage. In response to the complaints of the people, God caused quail to fly near enough to the ground to be captured easily by hand. They fell “in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings” (Psa 78:28). How large was that camp? The quail fell “beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp” (Num. 11:31 - NASB). A day’s journey was probably ten to fifteen miles. So the camp must have covered an area of 100 to 225 square miles. That is a huge camp, room for a lot of people!

Actually these “impossibilities” but enhance the totally miraculous nature of this notable expedition. The strongest arguments of men who insist, “This is impossible!” fall to the ground when God replies, “**It happened!**”

There are some hints in Scripture as to how Moses may have managed his task. The Egyptians had already organized the Israelites into manageable work groups (Ex. 1:11) which could have been utilized in coordinating their escape. Tribal separation was, no doubt, already in place and Moses had considerable time, while the plagues were in progress, to develop at least a temporary ‘chain of command’ and communication network. The early Indians of the American Plains had learned to communicate quickly with one another over many miles by use of smoke signals. Surely they were not more inventive than Moses – who was under God’s personal direction. As a matter of fact God utilized a very similar, but superior, method of guiding the entire encampment. The pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night, visible to every member of the encampment, lead them during the entire forty years.

The food and water for such a mass of humanity must have been a gigantic problem of immediate and critical importance. As to the food, they were supplied at first by the unleavened cakes they brought with them out of Egypt (Ex. 12:34, 39). They could have slaughtered some of their cattle also to supply them with sustenance until the Lord gave them the manna. Asaph recalled those days in Israel’s history and wrote, “Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food *in abundance*” (Psa 78:25 - NASB). On one occasion God miraculously fed them with Quail for a whole month (Num. 11:19, 20).

Their most urgent need was for water, and lack of it was their first complaint after the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15:24). This was supplied at first by the miraculous sweetening of the bitter waters at Marah (Ex. 15:23, 25 – “Marah” means “bitter.”), then their thirst was quenched at the oasis in Elim (Ex. 15:27). Through their forty years in the wilderness, evidently, they often drank from the natural water available. When they passed through the territory occupied by the descendents of Esau they were told to “buy water from them with money” so they could drink (Deut. 2:6). Then, when they lacked, the Lord supplied it miraculously (Ex. 17:1 - 7; Num. 20:2 – 11). Notice the abundant quantity of the water from the rock -- it was not just a trickle! “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it ran in the dry places like a river” (Psa. 105:41). “He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them abundant drink *like the ocean depths*. He brought forth streams also from the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers ... the water gushed out, and streams were overflowing” (Psa 78:15, 16, 20 - NASB).

We must also remember that the weather has evidently changed rather drastically since Old Testament times. It seems there was more rainfall then, for in Deuteronomy 11:14 God promised them two rainy seasons in the land, while Jeremiah informed them, later (Jer. 3:3), that the latter rain had been withheld because of their sins. Joel speaks of a day -- still future -- when Israel shall have turned to the Lord, and are permanently in the land (as the context there indicates), when the early and latter rain will be restored (Joel 2:23). Periodic rains could have done much to supply them with water. One passage of Scripture indicates that God did give them rain to supply their needs. “O God, when Thou didst go forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, the earth quaked; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Thou didst shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God -- ” (Psa 68:7 – 9 - NASB).

He could have, on occasion, multiplied the water as Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes, or as Elisha met the widow's need for oil (2 Kings 4:1 - 7). He could have enabled them to go without water for a time, as did Moses when he was on the mount (Ex. 34:28).¹

Our God provided wine for a wedding feast (John 2), fed 5,000 people from a boy's lunch (Matt. 14), and will one day cause water to break out in the wilderness and streams in the desert (Isa. 35:6, 7; 41:18). How can we doubt that He was able to meet the needs of His people in their journey to the Promised Land?

The entire consideration of the miraculous is at stake. Today, as science becomes increasingly aware of the great expanse of the universe, the almost unlimited variety of life forms, the mind boggling complexity of what was once called “the simple cell,” and the unexpected intricacy of the simplest atom, men draw wrong conclusions from the information. Instead of thinking, “What an awesome God we have!” they reason, “It is beyond belief that even a God could create all this!” Then, in an insane leap of “faith,” they decide that what an all powerful, super intelligent God could not have done was accomplished by blind chance. They insert vast stretches of time to account for it all but, as all experience demonstrates, time is not creative. As a matter of fact time, in itself, is a destroyer. Things do not wear *in* as time goes by

¹ There is an indication that he experienced two forty-day periods without bread or water back to back. After Moses broke the first tables of the law he “fell down before the LORD, *as at the first*, forty days and forty nights; [and] neither ate bread nor drank water” (Deut. 9:18).

-- they wear *out*. Clocks do not run *up* -- they run *down*. It is only when intelligence is applied and energy expended that time becomes a framework for even *improvement*.

The miracles recorded in the Pentateuch, including the movement of two million people across the desert, are also ‘mind boggling.’ As perception of the great magnitude of the miraculous in the story grows, the temptation to even the Christian, if his faith is not strong, is to adopt here the same negative approach the natural man takes in regard to creation. Doubt creeps in and he thinks, “It just *couldn’t* have happened, not literally at least.” We should, instead, take the spiritually positive approach illustrated by Abraham. God made a promise to him that seemed beyond possibility of accomplishment. He fully realized the “impossibility” of a son being born from his body (now, at ninety-nine, as good as dead) and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. However “he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, ... being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.” (Rom 4:19 – 21 - NASB).

So we can look the ‘impossibilities’ right in the eye, grow strong in faith, giving glory to God, and be fully assured that what God said He did, *He DID!* We will then cry out in delighted wonder, “Our God is even more gloriously powerful than we realized!”

We can no more reject the size of the company under Moses, because of the seeming impossibilities involved, than we can reject the incarnation, the resurrection of Christ, the coming Rapture, or the very creation of the universe. After all, it was not Moses who brought so many people out of Egypt and kept them for forty years in the wilderness -- it was the Almighty God who did it! “*You* led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (Psa 77:20).

The Significance of the Census

The census taken in this first chapter was intended to be a list of those soldiers who would enter the land so long promised to Israel, and wrest it from its wicked inhabitants. Numbers 1:3, however, has a sad counterpart in Numbers 14:29. Speaking to the Israelites numbered earlier God says, “The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.” It required another census at the close of the book to record those who would actually enter the land and, under Joshua, bring God’s judgment on the Canaanites. The story of how this came to be is the major theme of Numbers.

God made it very clear that their occupation of the land would involve warfare. In Numbers chapter one the expression “all who are able to go to war” is repeated fourteen times. God will give the victory, but they are to do the fighting. For us, too, our pilgrimage involves warfare. Ours is not physical battle, nor are our ultimate foes the people who oppose and, at times, persecute us. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). For this battle we must put on the armor Paul describes (Eph. 6:14 – 17) and be on the alert with all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the spirit – for all saints (Eph. 6:18). We must remember that our enemy is not our fellow believer, however irritating he may be. We all remember the ditty, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint

upon his knees.” Someone has added, “But Satan laughs without restraint when saints go clobbering other saints.” Paul warns us, “If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” (Gal. 5:15).

We also war against fleshly thoughts and speculations, whether arrayed against us by other people or by our own fleshly nature. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:3 – 5).

The Levites were not numbered with the army (1:47 – 54) since their responsibility was not to take up arms, but to maintain Israel’s relationship with the God who could give them their victories. All through Israel’s history it was their relationship with God, not their military exploits, important as they were, that determined their national welfare. “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth ... The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways” (Deut. 28:1, 7).

As important as our national army is today, in a world that seems to be always eager for war, our real safety lies in our relationship with God. Neither politics nor military might will be able to save this land unless God grants us a sweeping revival such as England experienced under the Wesleys. That great spiritual awakening is credited with saving England from a bloody revolution like the one that occurred in France.²

As *citizens*, being believers, we should stand firmly for high principles and moral behavior. We “ought to be the voices of decency, civility and moral sanity ... [we should] strive for justice, righteousness and mercy [and should] speak out and act against evil.”³ Our primary responsibility as *believers*, however, is not to force Christian behavior on the unsaved. Legislation can judge and punish immorality, but cannot create morality. Instead, we must point them to the Savior. In Paul’s epistles it is the believers, not the unbelievers, who are exhorted to live godly lives. Our lives should demonstrate to those around us what God can do in a life as He works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13 - NASB). The ship of state, even in America, is sinking and doomed at last to the judgment of God. It is more important to get people into the lifeboat than to paint the deck

² “Wesley assuredly was not a promoter of strife: on the contrary, many great historians, from Lecky to Halevy, believe that the spiritual revival he initiated and guided, saved England from revolutionary bloodshed.” -- “England Before and After Wesley” by J. Wesley Bready. Published by Hodder and Stoughton, Limited. Page 322.

³ From “The Almighty Vote,” an article in The Washington Post -- by Peter Wehner, director of policy at Empower America.

PREPARATIONS (Numbers 2:1 – 10:10)

The Arrangement of the Camps (Numbers chapter two)

With so many people involved, it was of utmost importance that everything be done in an orderly fashion. The encampment was laid out tribe by tribe with the tabernacle at its heart. The central location of the tabernacle had two main purposes. Being surrounded by the twelve tribes and their armies it was well protected from any enemy attack. Even more important was the fact that God was thus given the central place of honor and preeminence He so richly deserved. Also, with the tribes ringing it about, they were all equally “near”¹ their God.

Those Israelites who were not Levites² were caught between the possibility, on the one hand, of facing death in battle to defend the tabernacle and, on the other hand, the certainty of death if they approached too close to it (Num. 3:10, 38).

The tabernacle is an outstanding type of Christ, but what a contrast exists between the treatment accorded the type here and that extended to the anti-type (Christ) in the Gospels. When Christ “tabernacled” among men (John 1:14 – Greek) His people did not protect Him - they rejected Him and slew Him. He was not given a place of honor in the heart of Jerusalem but was taken “outside the camp” and nailed in shame to a cross (Heb. 13:12). Law forbade the “outsider” in Numbers to even come close to the tabernacle. But all is changed now because Christ was *willing* to be taken outside the camp and crucified. Now all that are willing to identify with the Christ *outside* the camp (Heb. 13:13) are invited *inside* the very Holy of Holies. The death of Christ rent the veil that shut men out from the presence of God (Matt. 27:51). Now we enter the holy place (Heb. 10:19, 20 - NASB) and find mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). Under law the holiness of God kept the Israelites at a distance (Num. 2:2) under threat of death (Num. 3:10, 38). Under grace the love of God gives life to the redeemed sinner and brings him into His very presence.

The tabernacle, like the temple later, faced east. Those encamped in front of the tabernacle, on the east of it, were under the standard of Judah. This takes on meaning when we learn that the Mount of Olives is east of the temple location in Jerusalem. When Christ, of the tribe of Judah, returns He will descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4) and enter the temple of that day through the eastern gate (Ezek. 44:1, 2). The

¹ Though they were near in contrast to the Gentiles who were far off indeed, they were kept at a respectful distance also (Num. 1:51), for the law did not give the access to God which is accomplished under grace.

² They are called “outsiders” in the New King James Version; “strangers” in the King James Version; and “laymen” in the New American Standard Bible.

tabernacle faced the rising of the *sun*³ that it might, symbolically, welcome the coming of the *Son*.

The Levites were encamped around the tabernacle also, between it and the tribal camps. Moses, with Aaron and his sons, was given the place of honor and responsibility – on the eastern side of the tabernacle (Num. 3:38).

The Order of March

The order of march was carefully laid out. The three tribes under the standard of Judah lead the way (Num. 2:9), followed by those under the standard of Reuben (Num. 2:16). The tent of meeting was next in line, surrounded by the Levites (Num. 2:17). Maintaining its central place, even in the march, it was followed by those under the standards of Ephraim and Dan (Num. 2:24, 31).

The careful planning of their encampment and the order of their march was essential from a practical viewpoint, but it also demonstrates that God is not a God of confusion. Order was possible because they recognized Moses' authority as God's spokesman. "Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so they did" (Num. 1:54).

Today it is Paul, not Moses, we must follow. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). The truth that God is a God of order remains - untouched by dispensational changes. Paul declares this in his instructions to the Corinthian church (and to us). "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). A great deal of doctrinal confusion, fleshly fanaticism, and emotionalism could be avoided if we followed Paul's instructions as carefully as the Israelites followed those of Moses.

The Spiritual Leadership and Service (Numbers chapters three and four)

Before considering the opening section of chapter three we need to give attention to its closing verses (40–51). Why was a whole tribe given this place of spiritual privilege and responsibility? It all dates back to the Passover in Egypt. All of the first-born in Egypt were doomed to death, but those among the Israelites were spared when the Passover lambs were sacrificed. The blood of the lambs satisfied the holiness of God on their behalf. God considered them to be His property, purchased by the blood of the lamb.

Paul reminds us that because of the blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb, we also are God's purchased possession. "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20). "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). Being His 'bought and paid for'

³ "They shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting, on the east side, toward the rising of the sun" – Num. 2:2, 3)

property, it is our “reasonable sacrifice” to present our bodies to Him to prove (or demonstrate?) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1, 2).

However, from a practical standpoint at least, it would be easier to set aside a whole tribe to be His special possession than to break into family after family, down through the years, to make up that select band. The firstborn were not considered, en masse, as merely a class of individuals, but each one personally was His – and there had to be a personal substitute to take his place in serving God. So also Christ did not merely die for sinners as a class – He died for me, personally.

My faith must be just as personal. I must believe that He did die for *me* as a person. I had believed Christ died for sinners from the time I was a child. A godly mother saw to that. But it was when I believed He died for *me* - that it was *my* sins that nailed Him to the cross – that I passed from death to life. This is what is meant when we speak of having Christ as a ‘personal Savior.’

Some confusion seems to exist about who the priests were. In my copy of the NASB translation there are two headings in Numbers three that are in error. At verse one the heading reads, “Levites to Be Priesthood,” and at Num. 3:25 it specifies, “Duties of the Priests.” The headings should read, respectively, “Sons of Aaron to be Priesthood” and “Duties of the Levites.”

It is true that the Old Testament priesthood is spoken of as the “Levitical Priesthood” (Heb. 7:11), and that the priests must be from the tribe of Levi (Heb. 7:14). However, most of the Levites were not priests. Only the descendents of Aaron were to be the priests (Num. 3:3; Josh. 21:19). The rest of the Levites were given to Aaron and his sons as helpers in the ministry (Num. 3:6). They were warned not to come near, where only the priests served, lest they be put to death. So the priesthood was Levitical but, more specifically, it should be thought of as the ‘Aaronic Priesthood.’

Much is found in Exodus and Leviticus regarding the priests and Levites, and their duties, while here only those matters that relate to the coming trek to the Holy Land are discussed.

After making it clear that only the sons of Aaron were priests, the matter of their relationship to the rest of the Levites is given attention. The Levites are to have a ministry carefully prescribed by God, but they are not to intrude into the ministry of the priests. If they do so they will die (Num. 3:10).

This setting apart of the priests from the rest of the Levites was protested only a short time later when Korah, a Levite, led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3). Moses reminded the Levites that they have been given a glorious task and scolded them for desiring the priesthood also. “Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to

Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?" (Num. 16:9, 10). God judged their attempted intrusion into the priesthood, and they died. (Num. 16:31- 33).

Today also we should be satisfied with the particular ministry God has given us (Rom. 12:3 – 6). However, today, there is no wall between one area of ministry and another, and we all have an access to God that even the priests did not possess. The man who has the gift of showing mercy will not be slain if he tries to be a pastor, but he will be far more effective if he finds out what his gift is and enters into it with his whole heart.

When I was a missionary to the Philippines one small congregation complained because their pastor was often away from his church. "He is always off holding evangelistic meetings" they complained. I realized we had put a square peg in a round hole. This man's gift was not pastor, but evangelist. We relieved him of his church, set him free to be a travelling evangelist, and sent a man to the church who had a pastor's heart and gifts. The church thrived under their new pastor and, after many years of fruitful service, brother Denzo is still carrying on an effective evangelistic ministry!

The Ministries of the Levites (Numbers 3:25 – 4:49)

At the time before us in Numbers three there were only three priests, Aaron and his two remaining sons. Nadab and Abihu had already died (Num. 3:4). They needed a lot of help to take care of the physical side of their ministry. Particularly, at this point, there was the task of disassembling the tabernacle, moving it to the next encampment, and reassembling it. This was entrusted to the Levites as part of their ministry. They were given to Aaron as his servants in the work of the Lord.

After they were in the land and the temple had been erected they "no longer [carried] the tabernacle, or any of the articles for its service" (1 Chron. 23:26). "Their duty was to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God" (1 Chron. 23:28). Their duties are given in detail in the following verses of First Chronicles twenty-three.

We live in a day when those who teach, preach, or evangelize need many helpers – doing 'secular' tasks for the Lord. How very important it is that the secretaries, pilots, cooks, doctors, and ditch diggers do not fail to appreciate the privilege that is theirs – and that others do not fail to appreciate them either! God has need of His 'Levites' today. Happily, there is much more freedom under grace. Many of the 'helpers' can, and do, have very valuable spiritual ministries as well. Also, the pastors and evangelists often share in the 'secular' aspects of the ministry, as they are needed.

The rather formidable task of transporting the tabernacle was carefully planned. Initially, when it was time to move, Aaron and his sons went inside the tent of meeting

and carefully covered the articles of furniture so they would not be seen by the Levites who were to carry them (Num. 4:5 and following). Then “Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task” (Num. 4:19).

First the Kohathites took out the furniture of the tabernacle. Because the various articles of furniture spoke so clearly of Christ and His ministry they were not to be loaded on carts as the tabernacle itself was. They received special treatment, they were to be carefully carried by hand. Remember how David made the mistake of transporting the Ark of the Covenant on a cart? It resulted in the death of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:3 – 7). Before David set himself the second time to move the Ark he may have read these very chapters of Numbers. He told those who were transporting the ark, “The LORD our God broke out against us [the first time], because we did not consult Him about the proper order” (1 Chron. 15:13). Then, following David’s instructions, “The children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD” (1 Chron. 15:15).

The high privilege of handling the furniture was given to the Kohathites – possibly because Aaron himself was a Kohathite (Josh. 21:10).

The construction and placement of the tabernacle furniture is given in detail in Exodus. The entire tabernacle was a giant object lesson – with detailed typology involved. That is why it was called the “tabernacle of testimony.” It not only testified to God’s presence with Israel, but also bore testimony concerning the coming Messiah. It was a blessed ‘portrait’ of Christ Himself. Only here, in Numbers, do we have the description of the coverings to be used when the furniture was prepared for the march, and there is typology in them as well!

The first item to be prepared for transit was the very heart of the tabernacle, the “Ark of the Covenant.” When the tabernacle was fully assembled a beautiful veil separated it from the rest of the tabernacle. The presence of this veil indicated that the way into the presence of God had not yet been revealed (Heb. 9:7, 8). Only the High Priest could go past the veil and enter the Holy of Holies, where the Ark was located, and then only once a year. The importance of this distance between God and man is emphasized in the passage before us. When the Kohathites entered the tent of meeting to get the Ark they evidently carried the veil suspended in front of them, and then dropped it over the Ark so it was never exposed to their view.

It was not until Christ died on the cross that the veil was torn in two by God Himself – from the top to the bottom (Matt. 27:51) - making a new and living way into the very presence of God (Heb. 10:19, 20). In the day of Moses a man would die if he dared to enter the Holy of Holies and even glance at the Ark residing there. Today God calls out to each believer “Come boldly to the throne of grace, that [you] may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Over the veil a covering of badger skin was laid. This protected the Ark from the weather. The badger skin typified the humanity of Christ (it was the outer covering of

every item except the Ark and, possibly, the Laver). Then, last of all, a covering of pure blue was put in place (Num. 4:6). This indicated its purely heavenly significance. In the other furniture we see Christ's deity and ministries through the flesh of His humanity (the badger skins). With the Ark, depicting Christ seated in Heaven, we see His humanity over-shadowed by His deity – so the outer covering was not badger skins, but pure blue!

The Table of Shewbread pictured Christ as the Bread of Life. It was covered with a cloth of blue for, like the manna, Christ was to be the Bread from heaven (John 6:51). The loaves of bread and a collection of implements used in worship were placed on the blue cloth and then a covering of scarlet was placed over it. The scarlet covering hints strongly of bloodshed. It reminds us that the bread must be broken before it can bring life. Christ must die. His blood must be shed before He can give life to those eating of the feast He provides. The top covering was of badger skins, indicating that, though He is God, it is as man He must die.

The Lampstand spoke of Christ as the Light of the World. It was covered with blue, for He was a light coming into the world from heaven (John 1:4, 5, 9). The lamp and associated articles were bagged into a covering of badger skins as the outer covering.

The “Golden Altar” was the Altar of Incense. It prefigured Christ as the One who makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). Its coverings were simply a blue cloth and badger skins. Although He prays for us from heaven (the blue cloth) it is His humanity (badger skins) that constitutes Him our “merciful and faithful High Priest” (Heb. 2:17).

The altar mentioned in verse thirteen was the Bronze (“Brazen” – KJV) Altar. This was the place where the sacrifices were made. A purple cloth was spread over it before it was covered with porpoise skins. Why was it purple instead of blue, as in the other coverings? If purple speaks of royalty, then there is emphasis here, typically, that on an *earthly* cross (no blue to represent heaven) the *King* would die!

What a message is in these coverings! Outside the tabernacle proper the King is on the cross on earth. Inside all is heavenly (blue). But the people there (represented by the Shewbread) are present due to the blood shed on that cross (scarlet) – and the heart of it all is Christ in glory (the Ark of the Covenant was located behind the beautiful veil).

At the conclusion of the above list of furniture it states, “These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry” (Num. 4:15). One is forced to ask, “Why is there no reference to the covering, or the carrying, of the Laver?” “One thing which the Kohathites almost certainly had to carry is omitted here, possibly because it was carried without any covering at all, and was not regarded as of equal sanctity with the rest. Anyhow, the omission is very remarkable, and may have been accidental.”⁴ As to the whether or not it was carried by the Kohathites, verse 15 seems to specifically leave it out in this very regard. In order to see a very glorious possible

⁴ The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 2, page 25, on Numbers 4:15.

answer to the problem we must learn a bit more about the Laver.

The Laver was a place of cleansing for those who had already passed by the Bronze Altar on their way in to the Holy Place. It speaks of cleansing for those whose sins have already been dealt with judicially at the cross – those who are already justified. It was a place to wash hands and feet. How very much we need to have our works and our walk cleansed!

According to Scripture it is the Word of God that meets this need for cleansing. As to our walk, it was the Living Word who said to Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me. ... He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean” (John 13:8, 10). When it is our “way” (what we do with our hands?) the answer is given clearly in the Psalms. “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (Psa. 119:9). In this Psalm it is the written Word that is in view. Does the Laver link the cleansing with the Word? It most certainly does. As with the other articles in the tabernacle it speaks of Christ, the living Word - but it is linked with the written Word as well.

A very significant detail is given concerning the structure of the Laver. “He made the Laver of bronze and its base of bronze, *from the bronze mirrors* of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” (Ex. 38:8). James speaks of the written Word of God as a mirror. “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror--” (James 1:23). The written Word of God not only reveals our sin to us, like a mirror, but it is also able to cleanse that sin away, as in the mirrors made into a Laver. Christ prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Is it not possible that there is a very important and glorious reason for the omission of the Laver in the list of things the Kohathites were to carry? It may have been intentionally omitted so its carrying would become the responsibility of volunteers. If so, it is wonderful that, with all the religious delegation of authority to Levites only, the carrying of the Laver was open to anyone. It shadows the truth that today the propagation of the Word is the task and responsibility of every believer! Like the Laver the Word is not to be covered at all, but is open to the view of anyone who will but look in faith!

The instructions to the Kohathites close with a solemn warning. If they allow themselves to become puffed up by the importance of the task given them and covet even greater responsibilities they could be cut off from the rest of the Levites in judgment (Num. 4:18 – 20). This warning was needed, as is demonstrated in the rebellion of Korah in chapter sixteen. How easy it is, for us as well, to have privilege foster pride.

In the Gospels, James and John were not only apostles of Christ but, along with Peter, enjoyed a special relationship with Him. They seem to have been an ‘inner circle’ of apostles. It was Peter, James and John who were present on several auspicious occasions when the others were not included. Rising in their self-esteem, as they relished

this distinction, they set their sights higher and asked to be on Christ's right hand and left hand in the kingdom (Matt. 20:21). From other Scripture it seems certain that those posts are reserved for Moses, representing the law, and Elijah, representing the prophets. James and John had the grace to *ask* (through their mother) rather than *demand*, as Korah had done. They didn't share the doom of Korah – however they were gently, but clearly, rebuked for their pride.

The most glaring example of this danger is Satan. His original responsibility seems to have been the post typified by one of the cherubim whose wings covered the Mercy Seat in the tabernacle. Describing his early responsibilities, Ezekiel writes, "You were the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek. 28:14). Lifted up in his pride he didn't merely request a higher post, nor even demand one - he made it his goal to *violently take* the highest position in the universe. He determined to wrest God from His throne and become "like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Instead, he will be "brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit" (Isa. 14:15). Korah will share eternity with him.

The Gershonites were to handle and transport the linen fence, the coverings of the large tent, the curtains, veils and any other 'software.' Before they began their journey they were given two carts and four oxen to facilitate this task (Num. 7:7).

The Merarites had charge of transporting the 'hardware' of the tabernacle. "This is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry" (Num. 4:31, 32).

We saw the beginning of modern day 'assembly-line production' when Henry Ford produced that amazing early day car, the 'Model T.' The basic idea was simple. Each worker was responsible for a certain small task so that, once the original planning and assignment of duties was completed, everything could be carried out like clockwork with a minimum of supervision. God was far ahead of Henry Ford. He arranged for the disassembly and reassembly of the tabernacle on an assembly-line basis. Each task was assigned to a worker by name (Num. 4:32). The worker didn't have to know much – just where his particular board or peg belonged.

When God assigns us our task and place in service we do not need a lot of top-heavy human supervision to be effective for the Lord. A story is told of Dwight L. Moody that illustrates this. He had been asked to address a committee on evangelism. When he did not appear at the meeting they sent for him. They found him on the street corner outside holding a street meeting. While the committee was *talking about* evangelization, he was *evangelizing!* Human planning has its proper place, but many committees could be disbanded if the individual believers knew where God wanted them to be and what He wanted them to be doing.

Defilement in the Camp (Numbers 5:1 – 10)

It was a giant step forward for the medical profession when they realized that disease is ‘catching’ and quarantine was enforced. But God instituted quarantine long before medical men thought of it.

What would be more fatal to their daily march than to have an epidemic of sickness spread through the camp? The solution was to separate the ill from the well, as was done by Moses. However, it was not merely the practical protection from contagion that was at issue. The camp, with God presiding from the tabernacle in its midst, was to be a representation, as much as possible, of the holiness of God. Those who were ill were not abandoned, but they were kept apart from the rest of the people so that God was surrounded by that which shadowed His perfection.

How different when Christ “became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14 – Greek). He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners. Yet He welcomed the sick, the crippled and even the dead into His presence and brought life and healing to them. “The law was given by Moses” – and it separated men from God as well as the sick from the healthy. But “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17), and instead of the sick defiling the tabernacle, the Tabernacle healed the sick. His cry was not “Outside the camp!” but “Come unto me!”

Another possible hindrance to the march would be the bitterness incurred when individuals not only sinned against the Lord (Num. 5:4) but also wronged one another (5:7). Our sins as believers are preeminently against God (Psa. 51:4), but they often grievously harm those about us as well. The simple solution to the problem would be confession by the guilty one and restoration to the victim (5:7).

Among the many offerings specified in the law, two are of special interest here. One was the sin offering, which had man’s sinful nature in view. The other was the trespass offering, dealing with the sins produced by that nature. One thing which accompanied the trespass offering, but was not associated with the other offerings, was restitution for the harm done (Lev. 6:2 – 6). Christ is viewed as the sin offering in 2 Cor. 5:21. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be *sin* [singular] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He is seen as the trespass offering in 1 Pet. 2:24. “Who Himself bore our *sins* [plural] in His own body on the tree.”

When restitution to those we have wronged is possible it greatly resolves the hurt and bitterness associated with such sins. However, many times it is not possible to ‘make things right.’ Here is where Christ’s death ministers to us in a wonderful way. As the trespass offering, He not only died for our sins, but also made restitution for us where it is impossible for us to do so. “I restored that which I took not away,” He cried out in the Psalms (Psa. 69:4 - KJV).

Trouble in the Home (Numbers 5:11 – 31)

At a time when God was supremely concerned about the national interests of His people, why does He focus attention on this problem in the home? As has been said by

thinking historians, “As goes the home – so goes the nation.” It may be added, “As goes the relationship between husband and wife – so goes the home.” Here the heart of that relationship is addressed. The basic foundation for the marriage relationship is the faithfulness to, and trust in, one another.

The solution to the problem of possible infidelity, and the resulting jealousy, that is set forth here seems strange indeed to us. Apart from the nature of the test for infidelity itself, we wonder why only the wife is depicted as capable of this sin. Also, why is there no censure against a husband who is jealous of his wife without cause? Several things must be borne in mind if we are to understand this passage.

As to the procedure itself, it appears to be adapted to the special needs of the march into Palestine, when there will not be time or facilities for a more extensive investigation into the cases that arise. It is mentioned only here. Leviticus is silent about it, as is Deuteronomy. Also it would work only in a situation where God was actively intervening in the affairs of His people. It is arranged that the woman have the opportunity to confess her guilt, but faces the certainty that the God who knows all about her will reveal the truth before it is over. It would be a meaningless and cruel ordeal today.

Concerning the male orientation of the passage, the “culture” involved must be taken into consideration. While God was concerned for the women in Israel, and gave them a much higher place than was granted to the women of any of the heathen nations, they faced a situation much more strongly male dominated than Christian women do today.

Paul is often depicted as a ‘male chauvinist’ or ‘women hater’ due to his teaching in 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:11 – 15. But the place women enjoy under grace is far above what they knew under law. Of course when the law said one is to love his neighbor as himself, a man’s wife was surely recognized as his closest “neighbor.” However Paul made some statements, specifically dealing with the husband and wife relationship, that rise above those found in the law. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. ... Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself ... Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself” (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33). “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (Col. 3:19). “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). While guarding carefully against the ‘Women’s Lib’ excesses, Paul delineates a place of high honor and respect to the women who know the Lord. Our passage in Numbers brings this into focus.

Another consideration helps us to understand why, at this particular time, the conduct of the wife is addressed without similar attention to that of the husband. Aside from the Levites, all of the husbands involved were part of Israel’s army. Nothing can be more devastating to the morale of a soldier than the gnawing fear that his wife is unfaithful to him. They are starting out on a campaign to conquer Palestine. These men will be fighting furiously for their homes and loved ones and will desperately need the

assurance their wives are faithfully supporting them.

We must not miss the most important truth suggested here. The stability of the home is critical to our own national interests. More could be accomplished, for example, by making it possible for all mothers to be full time in their homes than by spending billions on government programs. However, humanly speaking, the moral decline in our country has already gone past the point of no return. Only the transformation of our homes can save our land, and only a sweeping revival can produce a sizeable increase in the number of homes where husband and wife are faithful to one another and able to raise godly families.

Thank God for the godly Christian homes in our land, but we must realize the need for revival even in many Christian homes. Moral laxity has worked its way into the homes of true believers in epidemic proportions. Perhaps if a great host of Christian homes were back on track spiritually, enough people would be won to Christ to make a difference, even yet, in our fair land. Few of us can personally make much of an impact on the national situation, but we can take care of our small part of it by giving God His place in our individual lives and in our homes. Such a ‘grass roots’ approach would be able to do what no amount of legislation – even good legislation - could ever accomplish.

The Nazarite Vow (Numbers 6:1 – 21)

Another matter that could interfere with the orderly progress of the host in their march to the Promised Land would be an outbreak of envy, or jealousy, among the people. Would the Levites envy the nearness to God enjoyed by the priests? Would the other tribes long for the spiritual exaltation of the Levites? Would the women feel neglected and unappreciated spiritually? They did have trouble in all these areas later.

Envy is a terribly destructive emotion. It was for envy the leaders of Israel rejected and crucified Christ. “For he [Pilate] knew that they had handed Him over because of envy” (Matt. 27:18). The opposition to Paul’s preaching, on one occasion at least, was spawned by the envy of the Jews. “When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 13:45).

There would be no reason for envy of the spiritual status of others if one became a Nazarite. His separation to the Lord would then place the lowliest Nazirite on a spiritual par with even the High Priest himself.

The priests had a close relationship God, as was indicated in the instructions they received from Him. “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: ‘None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, *except for his relatives who are nearest to him*: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself” (Lev. 21:1 – 3).

However the relationship of the High Priest to God was even closer than that of the priests. “He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; nor shall he go near *any* dead body, *nor defile himself for his father or his mother*” (Lev. 21:10, 11). The Nazarite was above the priests in his separation to the Lord for, like the High Priest, “He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD” (Num. 6:7, 8).

While the separation to *ministry* was restricted to the men of the tribe of Levi, the honored *relationship to God* of the Nazarite was open to any Israelite, even to the women (Num. 6:2).

The vow of the Nazarite involved several prohibitions.

He was not to consume any product of the grapevine, not even the skins of the grapes (Num. 6:3, 4). Nor was he to drink any intoxicating drink, nor use vinegar. This was not because the grape vine was considered evil for some reason, for Christ turned water into wine, drank wine, and made it a part of the “last supper” as symbolic of His precious blood. The point is, they must be willing to abstain even from that which was good and acceptable in itself as an evidence of their loving, unquestioning, obedience to the Lord. This particular part of their vow would not be difficult to keep while they were in the wilderness. They had no grapes, aside from the one gigantic cluster brought back by the spies at Kadesh-barnea. At the close of the forty years Moses reminded them that none of them had drunk wine or strong drink during that time (Deut. 29:5, 6).

Also the Nazarite was not to cut his hair. The long hair was the visible evidence that he was a Nazarite. Paul remarks, “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” (1 Cor. 11:14). The Nazarite must be willing to bear reproach, to be scorned or dishonored by men, if need be, for His Lord.

He was also not to come near a dead body or ‘attend the funeral’ even when death claimed someone dear to his heart. He was dedicated in a special way to the living God and was not to have any contact with death.

There were two kinds of Nazirites. The only one spoken of here was a Nazirite by his own choice and for a stipulated time only. God did raise up Nazirites among them (Amos 2:11), but we have few specific examples of anyone taking this vow.⁵ We do, however, have several examples of those who, apart from their own choice, were Nazirites for life. Samson was such a Nazirite. “Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb” (Judges 13:5). Samuel was evidently such a Nazirite also, though the word “Nazirite” is not applied to him. “If You will indeed ... give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come

⁵ It seems that Paul at one time took this vow. “Paul ... had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow” (Acts 18:18).

upon his head" (1 Sam. 1:11).

In the New Testament John the Baptist was also, evidently, a Nazirite from birth. "He will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

The story of Samson indicates some differences between the Nazirite vow and the one who was such for life. When one living under a Nazirite vow touched a dead person he became unclean. He had to cut his hair and begin his years of dedication all over again. However Samson touched many dead bodies – he had slain a thousand men at one time. In hand to hand combat it would be impossible to avoid touching the dead. Yet his hair was not cut when this happened. Those under the vow had to cut their hair when they lost their place as Nazirites. Conversely, it was the cutting of Samson's hair that cost him his power as a Nazirite. He was a Nazirite for life – but didn't allow it to cramp his life style. In contrast, both Samuel and John the Baptist lived a life of dedication to God that was consistent with being Nazirites.

Today we do not have ritualistic Nazirites. However, in a sense, each believer is a *real* Nazirite for life, for Paul tells us that from our new birth on we are saints – those who are set apart to God. "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

We are urged to take on a spiritual Nazirite-like vow also. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1, 2). We can experience the reality that was merely symbolized in the vow described in the Old Testament.

As the Nazirite was to turn from the enjoyment of all products of the grapevine, we are to be willing to fore-go even some things that are good in themselves for the sake of the Lord and His will and work.

Paul lists a number of areas where the servant of the Lord has his "rights" in First Corinthians nine. But he remarks (concerning his right to take up offerings -- 1 Cor. 9:7 – 11), "Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12). He explains that we have the right to eat and drink (1 Cor. 9:4), yet he warns us, "If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ... It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak" (Rom. 14:15, 21). He set the example for us to follow. "If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13).

When taking stock of our own life style the question should not be "What is wrong with this?" but "What is *good* about this in view of my dedication to serve the

Lord?”

The story is told of a young Moslem who came to know Christ while an exchange student. After he had been a Christian for some time he was attending a Sunday School picnic. When he refused a ham sandwich someone asked, “Don’t you know that, under grace, we have the right to eat pork?” He replied, “Yes, I know that I have the right to eat it, but when I return home my father will ask, ‘Have you eaten the accursed meat?’ If I say, ‘Yes,’ I will never be able to talk to him about Christ. I am willing to sacrifice the pleasure of a ham sandwich to win my father to the Lord!”

Interestingly, when the Nazirite in the Old Testament concluded the time of his vow he did two things. He brought a rather extensive offering to the Lord and he shaved off his hair and burned it with that offering.

The believer today who enters voluntarily into a heart dedication to the Lord stipulates no time limit and brings his offering *when he enters into* the relationship. He brings his body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is his reasonable service. When he has concluded his life of dedication down here and appears before the Lord in glory He does that which seems to be suggested in the burning of the Nazirite’s hair. He brings all of those outward indications of his dedication to the Lord – His good works, his godly attitudes, his forgiving spirit, etc. – and disclaims any credit for them. He casts them on the altar to burn for God’s glory – he cries out, “It was all His work in me, to Him be the glory!”

The Nazirite, due to his separation to the Lord, was to have no contact with death. We are to observe the reality that the Old Testament vow only hinted at. Our “old man” is dead – he was crucified at Calvary (Rom. 6:6). We are not to let him be a part of our life. We cry out with Paul “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24), and arrive at the same answer he found. “I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 6:25). We are also to be free from dead works, works done in the flesh instead of God working in us “to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Only then can we really serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

Unlike the Nazirite we are to have contact with those who are dead – dead in trespasses and sins. We must be walking in the Spirit, however, lest these contacts defile us. As we keep our eyes on Him we will not be defiled by such contacts, but will be able, by the grace and power of God, to see the spiritually dead brought to life!

Christ was not a *ritualistic* Nazirite, for He drank wine and touched the dead. However He was the only perfect and total *real* Nazirite ever. His “vow” is found in Hebrews 10:7. “Behold, I have come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God.” He drank wine, touched the dead and, almost certainly, did not have long hair. But His separation to His Father was total and consistent. It was not necessary for Him to be put under restraint by the rules of the Nazirite, for He always did His Father’s will. “The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29). He touched the dead and they lived! He turned water into wine, drank

wine, and used it as a symbol of His precious blood poured out at Calvary. He did not need to bear the symbolic dishonor of long hair, for He was willing to be dishonored in stark reality - scorned, mistreated and savagely slain by men, that He might do His Fathers will. By His matchless grace may we have His mind in us!

The Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:22 – 27)

No doubt much could be written about these verses, but notice two things that stand out. First of all, God intended naught but blessing for Israel, and Aaron was to tell them so. God, as well as Moses, was accused by the people of bringing them into the wilderness to slay them with hunger and thirst. Their troubles were not because God was ‘against them’ but because they were, in their unbelief and disobedience, against Him.

We, like Israel, all too often bring upon ourselves many trials and difficulties, but we must never forget that *God is for us* - even to the extent that He “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:31, 32). All three members of the Trinity are *for us*. The idea that the Father is angry with us and that Christ is the one who loves us, and died to pacify the Father’s anger, is not scriptural. The Aaronic benediction is as good for us as it was for Israel.

In the second place, notice that the trinity of God is at least suggested. Paul uses a threefold benediction that specifically lists the members of the Godhead that are but shadowed here. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14).

The Offerings of the Tribes (Numbers chapter seven)

How fitting that the tribes should bring their offerings to the Lord at this time. They were surely presented in gratitude for all God had done for them in bringing them so far along the way, and to demonstrate confidence in what He was about to do. It is the tragedy of Numbers that this joyful expectation wavered and finally fell, turning an eleven day journey into one that stretched out interminably for thirty eight years!

The initial offering consisted of six covered carts (“wagons” – KJV) and twelve oxen to pull them. Like the offerings listed later in this chapter, they were from the leaders of the tribes (7:2) as the representatives of the tribes themselves. Not being Levites, they could not transport the tabernacle, but they provided the equipment needed by those who did.

These carts and oxen were very practical and timely gifts. The tabernacle had just been set up (v. 1) and must soon be taken over the wilderness trail. Most of its disassembled parts would be exceedingly difficult, if not virtually impossible, to carry on their shoulders, as the Kohathites were to do with its furniture (Num. 7:9). For instance the boards were over two feet wide and fifteen feet long (Ex. 36:21), and there were fifty-six of them (Ex. 36:23, 25, 27, 30). The eleven coverings of goat’s hair were each forty five feet long and six feet wide (Ex. 26:7,8). In addition there were three other coverings

as well: fine woven linen (Ex. 26:1), ram skins, and badger (“porpoise” - NASB) skins (Ex. 26:14). Not only would they be heavy, they would also be bulky and almost impossible to handle (have you ever tried to carry a mattress?). The carts were given to transport these items.⁶

These carts and oxen were not for sacrifice, they do not seem to be typical of anything, and they did not involve shedding of blood or scent of incense. They were just carts. Yet they were offered, the offering was accepted, and the record of it finds its place in Scripture.

Today we are all called on to offer our bodies a living sacrifice. In addition to this, or as an outgrowth of it, some are to leave the comforts and security of home to face hardships, persecution and, possibly, laying down their very lives in order to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their offering is recognized and respected by all. But there are others who provide the “carts.” Their offerings deserve recognition also. A missionary may evangelize an extended area – but what about those who provide him with the aircraft to facilitate his work? Someone gave a Jeep to our mission. If it had not been available to us our son, unless God had undertaken in some other way, would not have reached the hospital in time. He would be buried in a weed-covered grave in the Philippines today instead of preaching the gospel of the grace of God. Praise the Lord for the dedicated saints who provided the “cart.”

The rest of chapter seven relates the offerings brought by the leaders, on behalf of the tribes of Israel, at the conclusion of the dedication of the tabernacle and its altar. They are brought in the same tribal order as that of the march (established in chapter two) beginning with Judah and concluding with Naphtali.

We cannot really appreciate what is here for us unless we have had the patience to read the chapter all the way through! It seems to be exceedingly pleonastic, unnecessarily redundant, and boringly repetitive. We wonder why Moses took seventy-six verses (vs. 12 – 88) to describe what could easily have been handled in six or eight. The Living Bible condenses seventy-four verses into seventeen at this point. Josephus, in his “Antiquities of the Jews,” sums up this whole chapter in part of a paragraph. What special blessing can possibly spring from the length of this account?

The twelve offerings are identical. Yet each is described in detail, and in full, as if it were the only one of its kind.⁷

So in Romans 12:1 we are urged to bring our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord. Even though every believer brings the same sacrifice (his body) God takes note of

⁶ The carts were specifically given to Gershon and Merari (Num. 7:7, 8). The Gershonites (with two carts) were in charge of transporting the curtains and coverings of the tabernacle (Num. 4:25), while the Merarites (with four carts) were in charge of the boards and associated articles (Num. 4:31).

⁷ If twelve people, using the King James translation, each takes a separate section they can read them aloud in unison with scarcely a variation from one another.

each offering individually, and in detail, as though it, too, were the only one. There are no ditto marks on God's record book. We are never "just another cog in the machine" with Him -- we never get lost in the crowd!

We must *personally* honor *His* sacrifice at Calvary by believing the gospel and resting on His finished work for salvation. It is not enough for us to merely believe He died for sinners. It is when each of us acknowledges, "It was for ME – a guilty sinner -- He died!" that our faith becomes *personal*. Similarly He takes note of *our* sacrifice *personally* and *individually* in service. His reaction to our offerings is not "Millions have given their bodies as living sacrifices," but "*Bill Heath* gave *his* body to me as a living sacrifice! *George Jones* gave *his* body to me as a living sacrifice! ...," etc. We are not just a statistic with Him. Praise the Lord!

Not only did each man receive individual attention to his offering, that it might be personal, but the total is carefully noted also (verses 84 - 88). They were made aware of fellowship in giving and were assured they were not alone in their sacrifice. Here we have individuality without a sense of aloneness, and a sense of belonging without collectivism.

Notice also, it was God who directed that a separate day be given to each offering (v. 11). What could have been done in a few hours took twelve days! God was not in a hurry.

Often at college commencements those graduating (several hundreds sometimes) will stand together as their degrees are conferred en masse. This is time conserving, and very practical, but quite impersonal. I recall when one of our daughters graduated from Junior High School. There were about six hundred graduates in her class, and the ceremony took a couple of hours. Each one was given time to respond to his name and walk forward to receive his diploma. It was a tedious process, but it all became worthwhile when we heard the Principal call out, "Opal Lee Heath," and we saw our lovely daughter walk across the stage to receive the reward for her studies.

With all eternity ahead of us, I do not think our Lord will rush through the giving of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God is not in a hurry. How satisfying it will be at that time to hear the testimony of each believer. We will not be pressed for time, nor wondering when the meeting will be over.⁸ We will be able to hear, from each saint's own lips, the wondrous story of his walk of faith, his heartaches and sufferings, his victories through Christ -- and rejoice with him when he receives his rewards. Our turn will come, too, in God's good time, to tell how He worked in our lives. What a 'missionary conference' that will be!

Now re-read the chapter, when you are not in a hurry, and try to imagine how each group felt when it was *their* offering being received. It was not passed over, nor

⁸ Unlike our experience at Opal's graduation, we will not be merely biding the time until those we have known and loved during this life receive their rewards. We will be equally interested in every other member of the Body of Christ.

lumped with that of others -- they each had their day. All eyes were upon the gifts of their hands and hearts, and God felt it was worth a few extra verses to tell about it in detail. What a wonderful God!

The Lamps (Numbers 8: 1- 4)

The instructions given here do not refer to the original lighting (KJV) of the lamps, for that had already taken place earlier (Ex. 40:25). However, the lamps required re-lighting each morning and evening after the wicks were trimmed (Ex. 30:7, 8). The lamps had to burn day and night (Ex. 27:20), for there were no windows in the Holy Place. The only light there was from the Lampstand and its lamps.

The instructions here pertain to “when the lamps were arranged” each morning and evening after the trimming of the wicks and re-lighting. There must be continual care that the lamps were so arranged that they shed their light “in front of the Lampstand” fully illuminating the Table of Shewbread, the Altar of Incense, and the Lampstand itself. All three of these articles were typical of Christ, but there was reference to Israel in both the Table of Shewbread and the Lampstand. The Table of Shewbread typified Christ as the Bread of Life – but the fact that there were twelve loaves upon it spoke of the twelve tribes of Israel who were to feast on Him.

The Lampstand typified Christ as the ultimate light, and source of all light (John 1:4 – 9; 8:12; 12:35, 36). However He places in the world those who are to be witnesses for Him, shedding His light abroad (John 1:7, 8). In the Old Testament Israel was to be that light (Isa. 9:2; 43:10 – 12; 49:6). During the gospel period Christ Himself was the light (John 3:19; 9:5; 12:35, 36, 46), but when He returned to heaven the believers remained as the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14).

It is significant that in Revelation 1:20 the seven Jewish congregations are spoken of as “the seven golden lampstands.” Their light is their testimony for Christ. The number seven speaks of completeness and perfection, and those believers will be the only light that dark world will have,⁹ bearing testimony to Christ as the Savior. It is interesting that Paul writes to seven churches also in his church epistles. These seven churches epitomize the testimony of all the churches, giving forth their testimony, lights in the world today.

The placement of the lamps was critical. They were to be so positioned that they shed their light over the entire Holy Place. When the priest entered the enclosure he was not to focus his attention on the lights but, by the illumination they shed, he was to see clearly those pieces of golden furniture that spoke so eloquently of Christ. So our testimony should center on Him who is the Light of Life (the Lampstand), the Bread of

⁹ It is the author’s view that John was transported by the Spirit into the Day of the Lord (Rev. 1:10) and that everything following has to do with that coming day. This view is disputed, of course, but if it is valid the churches in Revelation two and three are seen to be Jewish congregations during the first three and a half years of the Tribulation. That they will be Jewish congregations seems sure from the statements in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9.

Life (the Table of Shewbread), and the divinely appointed intercessor (the Altar of Incense). His deity must shine forth from them all (gold speaks of deity in typology). A light can either conceal or reveal, depending on how it is placed. If it is so positioned that it shines in your face all you can see is the light. It needs to be so placed that you see everything else by its illumination. Only then is it of value. May our light so shine that those about us will not have their attention focused on us, but will clearly see the Savior.

Cleansing and Service of the Levites (Numbers 8:5 – 26)

The tasks of the Levites have been carefully laid out in earlier chapters, but they must be cleansed before they can discharge their duties.

As a missionary once told the students in the Bible Institute I attended, “The missionary is called not only *do*, but to *be!*” Workers with skill but no character are like the man who knows his gun so well that he can take it apart and reassemble it in the dark – but doesn’t know where to aim it or when to pull the trigger! ‘Know-how’ must be guided by ‘know-when’ and ‘know-why’!

We have in this chapter something of a review of information given in chapters three and four. The Levites belong to the Lord in consequence of the Passover in Egypt. They are His special possession (vs. 14, 16 – 18). However He has given them to Aaron to be assistants to the priests (vs. 11, 15, 19, 22). Taken from among the other tribes, they represented them in their service. This was indicated when the sons of Israel (through chosen representatives evidently) laid their hands upon them, identifying themselves with the chosen servants of the Lord (v. 10).

Before they begin their service they must be cleansed. No one unclean must serve the Lord, even in what might be described as secular kinds of labor in only a supporting role. Part of the cleansing was personal and physical. “The shaving and washing had, no doubt, a symbolic significance, but their primary object was simply, and obviously, personal cleanliness; it is the hair and clothes that chiefly harbour impurities, especially in a hot climate.”¹⁰ There was a ceremonial cleansing for them – Somewhat similar to that of the priests, but there were differences. “There was in their case [that of the Levites] no ceremonial washing, no vesting in sacred garments, no anointing with holy oil, or sprinkling with the blood of sacrifice [as was the case with the priests]. The Levites, in fact, remained simply representatives of the congregation, whereas the priests were representatives also of God.”¹¹

It is said that the Levites were to “make atonement for the children of Israel” (Num. 8:19). They could not do this by offering a sacrifice for them – for that was the work of the priests. Later in Numbers Phinehas “made atonement for the children of Israel” by putting a stop to the sin that was bringing wrath upon them (Num. 25:11, 13).

¹⁰ The Pulpit Commentary, volume two, page 68 in the section on Numbers.

¹¹ Ibid, page 67.

Somewhat similarly the Levites stood between their brethren and the tabernacle¹² “that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel came near the sanctuary” (Num. 8:19).

We, too, must be cleansed before we can serve effectively. We serve the Lord and minister to people not only by our witnessing and teaching but also by our example. Our life style among believers should not cause them to stumble. It should so touch them that they will be kept from temptations and sins that might otherwise have ensnared them – bringing God’s chastening on them. An adult may more effectively prevent a child from falling into the river by standing between it and the river, than by merely calling out a warning to the child from behind him.

The Levite was to retire at the age of fifty. However he was allowed to donate his services in retirement if he desired to do so (Num. 8:26). His voluntary service was evidently to be in the realm of instruction, advice, encouragement, and light tasks – for they “shall do no work.” “The word ‘charge’ [‘to attend to needs’ – NKJV] ... seems to signify the care of the furniture and belongings of the tabernacle, while ‘service’ [‘work’ – NKJV] means the laborious work of transport, or of preparing sacrifices.”¹³

Retirement is often a kindness and mercy to the elderly, but the opportunity to ‘keep their hand in’ is beneficial to both the retiree and those taking up his responsibilities. The young have special value because of their strength, dedication and innovative thinking. They may “have more understanding than all [their] teachers” if the word of God is their meditation (Psa. 119:99). They may also “understand more than the ancients” if they keep God’s precepts (Psa. 119:100). But, as Rehoboam discovered, it may also prove helpful to consider the mature wisdom and appreciate the experience of those who have served before. (See 1 Kings 12:6 – 15)

The Passover (Numbers 9:1 – 14)

In spite of all the last minute preparations for their march to the Promised Land, they were told to take time to observe the Passover. Since they were originally instructed to observe it “when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised” (Ex. 12:25. See also Ex. 13:5), they may not have expected to observe it while they were still in the wilderness.

As a matter of fact, it is questionable whether they observed another one until they were in the land. Surely as the following thirty-eight years ticked by it would have been more and more difficult to celebrate it. The attendance would necessarily dwindle as the years elapsed, for no one could take part in it unless they were circumcised (Ex. 12:48) and, for some reason, this rite was not being practiced while they were in the wilderness (Josh. 5:5). It was only after the new generation had been circumcised that Joshua held the next recorded Passover (Josh. 5:5 – 19).

¹² Even physically their encampment was between the tabernacle and the location of the other tribes.

¹³ The Pulpit Commentary, volume two, page 69 in the section on Numbers.

They were to observe it “according to all its rites and ceremonies” (Num. 9:3). This would seem to involve four days for making sure the lambs were perfect (Ex. 12:3, 5, 6) and a week for the feast of unleavened bread (Ex. 12:18). The entire observance would take eleven days. In their eagerness to be on their way to the land of milk and honey they could have chafed under this delay. If so, they would be even more discouraged when eleven additional days were consumed for the sake of those who were unable to take part in the first Passover, and another one was observed just for them. They could have said, “We are just too busy to take off twenty-two days for this celebration.”

This rings a bell in my heart, for all too often I have been too busy (with the Lord’s work!) to take time to pray and read His word. One day I was under such conviction about this that I wrote the following, which I need to re-read from time to time.

I've so very much to do today --
 'I don't have time,' Lord, not to pray.
 How easy it is to beat the air
 When I fail to take the time for prayer.

I'm fretting and running all day long,
 With no word of praise nor note of song:
 So busy with tasks that matter not,
 And failing to witness as I ought.

Still pushing on doors that Thou hast closed,
 Neglecting the path Thou hast proposed,
 The wasted hours soon slip away
 When I fail to take the time to pray.

As well be too hungry to stop and eat,
 Too hot to seek shelter from the heat:
 As well be too lost to use the map,
 Too sleepy to take a needed nap!

I fall on my knees this morning hour
 Asking for wisdom, grace, and power.
 I've too many things to do today --
 I don't have the time, Lord, not to pray!

There were several reasons for God’s insistence on their taking ‘time out’ to observe the Passover. First of all, it was the Passover that had put them, as a nation, on redemption ground. Before they had received the law or been given the Sabbath to keep; before they had been given water from the rock or tasted bread from heaven; before they had engaged in a single battle; before they had the pillar of fire or the tabernacle over

which it stood guard – they were His people, redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb. It was not only the first-born who were spared that night. The blood was on the door of the house and everyone in the family ate of that one roasted lamb. The blood on the doorposts meant safety for the entire household, for they were warned “none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning” (Ex. 12:22).

The Passover is rich in its typology. The lamb pictured Christ in His death on the cross, as Paul specifically tells us (1 Cor. 5:7). The lamb had to be under observation for four days to make sure it was without blemish. Christ was under close scrutiny by the whole nation for about four years and was proven to be holy, harmless and undefiled. The lamb had to shed its blood, even as Christ shed His blood on Calvary. The blood was to be applied to the side posts and lintel of the doorway with hyssop. Christ’s blood must be applied to our hearts by faith. The lambs were to be slain by the whole congregation of Israel (Ex. 12:6), just as it was the whole mob of Israelites that shouted, “Crucify Him!” in the gospels. Thus it was the sin of every Israelite – yea, the sin of every man – that put Christ on the cross. Other details – no bones broken, the lamb must be a young male, etc. – also find their fulfillment in Christ. They were told, “If the household is too small for the lamb” they were to share it with their next door neighbor. The lamb was never too small for the household! As with our Lamb, the sacrifice was enough to satisfy and to share! (Ex. 12:4). The blood, applied to the two doorposts and to the lintel – when the blood had dripped from the lintel to the threshold below, as it surely would – formed a cross standing between those Israelites and judgment. God gave a “*sign* of the cross” pointing forward to Christ – but we need no such sign pointing back, for we have Him, the *Christ* of the cross.

The Passover was the foundation for the entire transition from bondage in Egypt to the settlement in the land of promise. The original Passover wrought their deliverance from Egypt and initiated the New Year (Ex. 12:2). The second one started them on their way to the land and the third (recorded) one celebrated their arrival there. “The children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:10 – 12). The initiation, progress and culmination of the exodus were based on redemption through the blood of the Passover lamb.

It is important to realize that the Passover was a once for all sacrifice. This was emphasized when they were not even allowed to carry it over to a second day (Ex. 12:10). There were seven days of feasting on the unleavened bread, but only one day for the Passover itself. While the yearly memorial of it involved the offering of lambs, and is called by the name “Passover,” it was actually only a memorial of the Passover in Egypt. “The Passover of the yearly celebration was but a memorial of the Passover in Egypt, which was the one true type.”¹⁴ Only in Egypt were the firstborn in danger of death.

¹⁴ “The Coming Prince” by Sir Robert Anderson. 16th edition dated 1967, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Mich. page 118, footnote.

Only in Egypt were they set free from bondage and sent on their way to the Promised Land. Only in Egypt did they put blood on their doorways.¹⁵ The purpose of the yearly Passover was to remind Israel each year of the redemption that had gained their freedom for them and to teach this truth to the new generations. “It shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households’ ” (Ex. 12:26, 27).

One wonders where they obtained unleavened bread for the Passover in Numbers nine. Only a short time later they cried out, “There is *nothing at all* except this manna before our eyes!” (Num. 11:6). God could have made it available in some unrevealed way, but the manna could have been used, for it was bread. “When the children of Israel saw it, [the manna] they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ ... And Moses said to them, ‘This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat’ ” (Ex. 16:15). The manna was surely completely unleavened, for leaven speaks of sin and evil - and it was the bread of heaven, angels food (Psa. 78:24, 25). No more perfect “unleavened bread” could have been found for this Passover!

In Egypt the people ate the feast with a belt on their waist, sandals on their feet, and their staff in their hand, prepared for travel. They were to eat it in haste, for the next day they would be on their way out of Egypt (Ex. 12:11). Here in Numbers they also ate it prepared for action, for they were soon to begin the final march to Canaan. In Joshua five they would eat it in readiness for the conquest of the land.

Numbers opens with the census, for it is a fitting introduction to the book. However the census was actually taken between the designated Passover and the special one a month later (Compare the date in Num. 1:1 with that in Num. 9:1). Those enrolled in that census were reminded, by the Passover, of what had happened a year before. Following the Passover in Egypt Israel had marched triumphantly out of their bondage and had seen Pharaoh’s army destroyed, quite apart from their participation in the battle. They had also been victorious over Amalek, when their army *was* involved. Now another Passover encourages them to expect that God will give them victory over the Canaanites, whether by His direct intervention or through His hand upon them as they fight and settle in their new homes. They are reminded that their entry into the land will be no more of a problem to God than their exit from Egypt. They both depend on the blood of the lamb as the basis for God’s gracious work on their behalf. Similarly both our deliverance from spiritual death at our conversion and our safe arrival in heaven, are totally dependent on the blood of our Passover Lamb.

Paul draws a critical lesson from the Passover in 1 Cor. 5:6 – 8. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened

¹⁵ Neither in Numbers nine nor Joshua five did they have doorways, for they were living in tents.

bread of sincerity and truth.”

However when he speaks of celebrating the feast he is not asking us to keep the Old Testament Passover, or even a New Testament modified version of it. “Let us keep the feast” does not mean we are to keep the Jewish Passover any more than “We are the circumcision” (Phil. 3:3) indicates that we should be physically circumcised. He is not describing our conduct for a seven-day period, but our lifestyle every day of our lives. He is saying, in effect, “Israel refrained from the use of ‘the old [physical] leaven’ for seven days to celebrate the death of the Passover lamb. The leaven from which we must refrain, in light of the death of Christ our Passover, is the ‘leaven of malice and wickedness’ – and not just for seven days, but for the rest of our lives.”

Although the Lord’s Table seems, at first glance, to be an outgrowth of the Passover (1 Cor. 11:23 – 35) there are some contrasts worthy of notice. The Passover was to be carried out “according to all its statutes and according to its ordinances” (Num. 9:3). It was to take place at a designated time; was to be preceded by observation of the lamb and the removal of all leaven from the house; and was only for circumcised individuals. The feast accompanying it was carefully described and attendance was mandatory.

What a contrast we find in 1 Cor. 11:23 – 34! For the Lord’s Table no time is set, nor is there a suggestion as to how often it should be observed. “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup” (1 Cor. 11:26) tells the whole story. There are no rituals to observe, no limitations as to who may participate, and not even a specific command to take part in it. There is, of course, no animal sacrifice - for our Lamb has already been offered once for all.

That the Table of the Lord is for us today seems clear. How could it be ‘Jewish’ when the apostle to the Gentiles is the only one who mentions it? How could it be the continuation of the Old Testament Passover and Christ’s last supper when it was part of the revelation given to Paul (1 Cor. 11:23)? How could it be only for believers before Acts twenty-eight when it is not to be discontinued short of the Rapture? “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Also Paul gives the bread a new significance, in the communion, that was not mentioned by Christ. The bread not only speaks of Christ’s physical body broken for us but also of His mystical Body. “Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). To gather solemnly around this symbol of the unity of the Body while there were divisions among them was, at best, outrageously inconsistent. They were “not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:29).¹⁶ When Paul said, “*First of all*, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you” (1 Cor. 11:18) he was indicating the divisions were the most

¹⁶ According to a marginal reference in the NKJV edition of The Nelson Study Bible the passage reads, “Not discerning the *one* body” (in the “NU-Text”).

important problem they faced at the Lord's Table. This hypocrisy was so serious that they were being chastened for it (1 Cor. 11:30).

As we show forth the Lord's death today may we not be guilty, as they were, of doing to the mystical Body what the Jews and Romans did to His physical body. "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27).

The Passover looked back to the type of Christ as the Lamb of God and looked forward to the cross. The Lord's Table looks back to the cross and forward to the Rapture. The Passover anticipated Israel's march to the land of milk and honey, and they ate it in haste, fully prepared to leave the next day. The Lord's Table anticipates our catching away to glory, and we should be ready to leave, for it could happen tomorrow! Maranatha!

Guidance for the Journey (Numbers 9:15 – 10:10)

The Cloud (Numbers 9:15 – 23)

The pillar of cloud that served as a guide to Israel during the Exodus was a tremendous physical display of God's vast creative power. In pictures illustrating it the artists usually portray it as a phenomenon about the size of a modern day hot air balloon, elongated vertically as though floating above, but anchored to, the tabernacle. While it evidently, like the funnel cloud in a tornado, had a pendant of cloud reaching down to the tabernacle, the cloud itself was vast enough to cover Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16). It was of sufficient size to isolate Pharaoh's entire army (Ex. 14:28), including more than six hundred chariots (Ex. 14:7), from a multitude of some two million people for an entire night. It was large enough to light the way for the Israelites when they traveled by night. "The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, *so as to go by day and night*" (Ex. 13:21). At the close of the forty years Moses reminded Israel, "[God] went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you *the way you should go*, in the fire *by night* and in the cloud *by day*" (Deut. 1:33). During the Millennium "the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." It will serve as "a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain" (Isa. 4:5, 6 – KJV).

Thus the cloud manifested God's presence with them, and served as guide, protector from the enemy, shelter from the desert heat by day and illumination for the travel by night. It was an impressive and dramatic miracle. It continued with them for forty years. It outlasted a whole generation of Israelites! The miracles wrought before the eyes of the world in Moses' day, like those associated with Christ, were "not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26; 1 Cor. 15:6).

Numbers 9:15 – 23 looks back on the thirty-eight years that at this point were still ahead of them. This is evident, for there was no time when the cloud could have lingered

over the tabernacle for a whole year (Num. 9:22) except after Kadesh-barnea. During the yearlong residence at Sinai they did not yet have the tabernacle, for it was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year of the Exodus (Ex. 40:17). At Numbers nine it had just been set up (Num. 9:15) - and the trip to Kadesh-barnea took much less than a year. Moses quite evidently wrote Numbers near the close of the forty years. As he looked back, three things stood out concerning the cloud.

First of all, the cloud was a visible evidence of God's presence with them. God had promised, "My Presence will go with you" (Ex. 33:14). This truth is clearly emphasized in our passage in Numbers. In only six verses it tells us seven times that when Israel followed the cloud they moved at the commandment of the Lord, or to keep His charge. The cloud is identified with the Angel of God (a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ). "The Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them" (Ex. 14:19).

When the cloud is first mentioned in connection with the departure of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 14:19, 20) "*The LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud*" (Ex. 14:24). We are also told that the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud (Ex. 16:10). God specifically told Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you" (Ex. 19:9 - compare Ex. 24:16; 33:9). Even the inhabitants of Palestine had heard about this overwhelming manifestation. "They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night" (Num. 14:14). We are informed that on at least one occasion the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses (Ex. 34:5). Clearly the cloud was the constant visible indication that God was with them. No wonder it is called "the cloud of the LORD" (Ex. 40:38).

It is not only during the Exodus that we read about the cloud of the Lord. In the New Testament God spoke to Peter, James and John out of the cloud and declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matt. 17:5). Also, it is very possible that when a cloud received Christ at His ascension it was the glad welcome home by the Father - who had so recently found it necessary, for our sake, to forsake His Son when He was dying on the cross (Acts 1:9). The two witnesses during the Tribulation will ascend to heaven in a cloud (Rev. 11:12). Is this not, again, "the cloud of the Lord"?

At the Rapture we will not be met by the "cloud of the Lord" but by Christ Himself. Paul says, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them *in ... clouds*¹⁷ to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). We will not just be caught up "in *the* [atmospheric] clouds," but "in clouds." It is very possible he is referring to clouds of believers who will be caught up (see Heb. 12:1 for just such a use of the word "cloud").

¹⁷ The definite article "the" is not in the Greek text.

During the millennial reign of Christ the cloud will appear again. “The LORD will create over the area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and a flaming fire shining at night; for it will be a protection over all that is glorious” (Isa. 4:5 – Berkeley Version). They will no longer need the cloud to guide them, for they will never again be moved from their homes, but it will be a constant reminder to them that the Lord is with them, as He was when they were traversing the wilderness. It will also be like a tent (“tabernacle”) “for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain” (Isa. 4:6).

The cloud was first introduced to us in connection with the departure from Egypt, and now it is brought to our attention again just as they are about to depart for the Promised Land. They will be travelling through that “great and terrible wilderness” (Deut. 1:19) on the way to Kadesh-barnea. They have never been this way before so they will need guidance every step of the way. At the close of the forty years Moses bore testimony to God’s faithfulness to them. “In the wilderness ... you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, *in all the way that you went until you came to this place*. ... [He] went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day” (Deut. 1:31, 33).

Secondarily, What Moses was impressed with as he looked back over the forty years in the wilderness was that the cloud never departed from them. “In Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go” (Neh. 9:19). That is amazing when one considers the almost constant rebelliousness of the people and the many times God had to chasten them for it. Paul wrote something that seems to describe this miracle of grace. “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).

The third thing Moses noticed in these verses is perhaps the most amazing of all. Looking back over forty years in the wilderness Moses admitted that Israel did not fail to follow the cloud. “At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; *they kept the charge of the LORD*, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses” (Num. 9:23). They complained, rebelled, blasphemed, and provoked both God and Moses time after time. They suffered major chastenings at God’s hand for their perverseness, disobedience and unbelief. But they did not fail to follow the cloud! It is sad that they were not able also to follow God’s guidance as to their conduct. If they had believed God and acted in obedience to Him the cloud would have led them into the land of milk and honey instead of into thirty-eight years of drab desert existence.

If we go our own way in our walk we may find ourselves just where God wants us to be, *under the circumstances*, on the *shelf*! “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27 - KJV). When I was in Bible School I heard a Bible teacher tell of an ancient inscription in Koine Greek that used the word translated “castaway” here. It described a cracked earthenware vessel that was not thrown away but put on a shelf for

some limited use in the future. To put Paul's concern in modern slang, he didn't want to be a 'crackpot' and be 'put on the shelf.' Nor should we!

There is one other detail we need to consider about the cloud. It not only went before them as they traveled, but also remained over the tabernacle when they were to rest. As we serve the Lord today we need His guidance both for our activities and our rest times. Realizing that we are not under the law, and not subject to the Sabbath laws, we may fail to get the rest we need. In the midst of their strenuous service "[Christ] said to [His apostles], 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while,' for there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat" (Mark 6:31). We would have fewer 'burnt out' pastors and missionaries if they occasionally took time out from overly busy schedules to rest. We should no more feel guilty for resting when the cloud stops over us than we should feel imposed upon and overworked when the cloud moves. The important thing is to recognize His leading and follow it.

The Silver Trumpets (Numbers 10:1 – 10)

. God has His own trumpet and He used it when they received the law (Ex. 19:13, 16, 19). He will again use His trumpet at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16),¹⁸ and when Christ comes in glory (Matt. 24:321). Angels utilize trumpets also. They will one day sound them to announce judgments to be poured out on the earth during the Tribulation (Rev. 8:2, 6 & following). In all cases the trumpet is used to gain attention to some very important message or herald an awe inspiring event.

We have a message worthy of being announced with a trumpet blast. Paul commended the Thessalonian believers for their missionary zeal. "From you the word of the Lord has been [*trumpeted*] forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place" (1 Thess. 1:8). Although the Greek word for trumpet is not used in this verse, the word translated "sounded forth" has that connotation.¹⁹ The picture is of a 'town crier,' or his ancient equivalent, sounding a trumpet to gain attention and then boldly shouting his message to all within sound of his voice. We have a wonderful message to proclaim, but I fear we are more inclined to whisper it than to trumpet it forth.

Israel needed guidance at they traveled. The cloud let them know when and where to go and how long to stay there. However they needed guidance also as to many other details of their lives that the cloud could not supply. The silver trumpets made by Moses helped meet this need. They were a sort of public address system for him to communicate his orders to all of the people easily and quickly.

These silver trumpets were to be used in a multitude of ways. They were blown to assemble the leaders, or to call the entire assembly together- whether to begin their

¹⁸ This trumpet will not be the last of a series of trumpets not yet revealed when Paul wrote his epistles, but the last for US – a final gathering of the saints of this age of grace.

¹⁹ "The Greek word translated 'sounded forth' means 'to sound forth as a trumpet or thunder'" – An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words by W. E. Vine, Thomas Nelson publishers, page 1068.

march or prepare for war. They maintained order when they broke camp by notifying each tribe when to set out on the march. Trumpets expressed their gladness in times of rejoicing, and announced the beginning of each month. They also accompanied the burnt offerings and peace offerings. The trumpets were not only greatly useful, they were also an almost constant reminder that the Lord was their God (Num. 10:10). Incidentally, in the conquest of Jericho under Joshua the clarion voice of the two silver trumpets was not heard. On that occasion the mournful wail of seven ram's horns sounded forth the warning of defeat and destruction to the trembling inhabitants of the doomed city.

We do not have either cloud or trumpets today. We do need guidance however. God has a plan for us as much as He did for His people in the Old Testament, and it is a *good* plan. Concerning Judah He said, "I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). As we yield our bodies to Christ as living sacrifices and allow Him to transform us, we are able to prove just how good and acceptable and perfect that plan is (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2).

We are guided chiefly by the word of God and the Holy Spirit, although He does use circumstances to guide us at times in areas where the word of God has not spoken. The Israelites had the cloud of God over their heads, we have the God of the cloud in our hearts. They had to look up to see the cloud. We are to look up, also, beyond the cloud and "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." We are to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1,2). Just as the cloud did not forsake them, even in their rebellion, so nothing can separate us from our Lord or His love, even when we are experiencing His chastening. The guidance possible through the cloud and the trumpets was very limited in its scope. As problems arose God had to give additional verbal instructions to them through Moses. We do not need such further revelation today for we have His completed word to which we can turn in any circumstance we face in life.

As with Israel, however, the guidance is of little value if we do not follow it. He is under no obligation to give us further knowledge of His particular will for our lives until we have obeyed what we already know from His word. A good beginning in knowing God's will is found in First Thessalonians. "For *this is the will of God*, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3). "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:14 – 22). When this clearly revealed will of God has been addressed we can expect Him to guide us further as we have need of it!

The Israelites evidently found it easier to follow the cloud than to abide by the detailed instructions given through Moses. They ended up in the place God had selected for them, but they acted in unbelief and disobedience when they arrived there. It seems to me that we are sometimes more interested in *where* God wants us to serve Him than

we are in *how* we are to serve Him. The call of God to us is not only to *go* where He wants us to *go*, but also to *be* what He wants us to *be*. If we are what He wants us to be we are in a position to go where He wants us to go (Num. 9:17a) or to stay where He wants us to stay (Num. 9:19).

The preparations for the march to the land of milk and honey have been thorough and time consuming, but now, finally, they are ready to set forth on what is intended to be the last leg of their journey home!

HOMEWARD BOUND – AT LAST! (Numbers 10:11 – 12:33)

The Tribes Set Out on the Journey (Numbers 10:11 – 28)

God's people were told they would be taken to a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, but they have spent over a year in the bleak desert with only the manna to eat. Now, at long last, the careful and extensive preparations are completed and they are on their way 'home!' How excited they must have been to be finally on the move!

We are told that it was an eleven days journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea (Deut. 1:2). This, no doubt, was how long it normally took a caravan, traveling every day, to make the trip. It would take the Israelites longer due to the time consumed in setting up and breaking camp. They would not be travelling on the Sabbath and probably would take times of rest at the discretion of the guiding cloud. Even so, it should not have taken them very long to arrive at their destination. At this point no one dreamed that, even though they would arrive at Kadesh-barnea in only a few months at most, it would be over thirty eight years before any of them would arrive in the good land, and that most of them would never see it at all.

What a spectacle it must have been to see the cloud rise majestically from the tabernacle, hear the trumpets begin to sound, and see the joyous multitudes respond to form the orderly procession that had been so well planned for them!

As the silver trumpets sounded the tribes took their places in the order of march, with their standards proudly displayed. What an honor it would have been for each of their leaders to bring his tribe into the Promised Land! What a tragedy that they ended up dying in the wilderness instead!

Notice that the order of march allowed those who were transporting the holy tent itself to arrive before those who were entrusted with the furniture to be placed in it. By the time the Kohathites arrived with the furniture the tabernacle could already be assembled to receive it.

A Question of Leadership (Numbers 10:29 – 32)

The conversation between Moses and his brother-in-law (or father-in-law?)¹ has been viewed in different ways by expositors. Some see it as a kindness extended to

¹ There is a problem in regard to the name of Moses' father-in-law. He is called "Reuel" in Ex. 2:18; "Jethro" in Ex. 3:1; 4:18 and 18:12; and Hobab" in Judges 4:11. Here in Num. 10:29 the problem is further complicated by the assertion that Hobab was the son of Reuel! For a scholarly and lengthy discussion of this problem see The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 2, page 92 in the section on the book of Numbers. It is an interesting problem, but it does not affect either the inspiration of Scripture or its message. The name used in the particular passage under consideration will be used in the comments upon it.

Hobab, offering him an honored place of leadership, recognizing his worth to them, and promising him he will share in the blessings in store for Israel. This interpretation looks at the incident with Hobab's interests, and the respect of Moses for his brother-in-law, in the foreground. Moses is seen as graciously giving Hobab something to do that will make him feel needed.

It is pointed out by some that this passage indicates the wisdom of Moses. They suggest that under the over-all guidance of God, Moses recognized the value of whatever human resources were available to him.

It would be strange indeed, however, if Moses thought he needed the knowledge and the eyes of Hobab when God Himself had been their guide for over a year. How very easy it is to let sentiment rule in our thinking, or to trust in the arm (or eye!) of the flesh instead of in the living God. What did Hobab know about where they should camp in this wilderness? Surely it would have been better to trust Him who promised "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with *My* eye" (Psa. 32:8)! Could Hobab's eyes have seen better than those of the One who made them? David said of God, "The darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You" (Psa. 139:12). Hobab had no such 'night vision.' He would have been helpless at night if it had not been for God's pillar of fire. Should not Moses have committed his way unto the Lord (Psa. 37:6)?

Of course Moses did not have the psalms quoted above to guide him, but he did have the pillar of cloud and fire. He had already experienced its guidance for over a year. David recalled Israel's wilderness experience in one of his psalms. "O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness, the earth shook; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Psa. 68:7, 8). When God is guiding anyone His power is also available to care for those who follow His leadership. Even if Hobab picked the right way he would be powerless to provide the rain – or any of their other needs – or to make the mountain shake, as God did.

The inadvisability of Moses' offer to have Hobab lead them is dramatically revealed in Numbers 10:33, 34. The Ark of the Covenant, normally in the center of the procession, took the place of leadership that Moses had offered to Hobab, and went before them for the next three days. Before, when Pharaoh's army had been ready to attack Israel, both the cloud and the Angel of God had left their place before them and moved behind them to protect them (Ex. 13:19). Here the Ark of the Covenant moved from its place of centrality and went before them to lead them and to seek out a resting-place for them. Instead of Hobab seeking a resting-place for God, who would remain over Israel wherever they were, God sought out one for Hobab – if he was still with Israel. The cry of Moses was not, "Rise up, Hobab ... return, O Hobab," but "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You," and "Return, O LORD, to the many thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:35, 36).

We should give respectful attention to godly counsel when it is offered (Prov. 11:14), but the ultimate guidance to which we must respond in unquestioning obedience is that which comes from the Lord. Men might, or might not, know the path we should take, but they cannot enable us to follow it. Only God has promised to work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28). Only God is able to work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). It is only Christ who can strengthen us so we can do all things (Phil. 4:13). Only God can transform and renew our minds so we will be enabled to follow His will and both know for ourselves, and demonstrate to others, just how good and acceptable and perfect His will is (Rom. 12:2). We may appreciate and listen to advice of the Hobabs in our lives, but only God can effectively lead us. Hobab could have been a great blessing to Moses and Israel if he had said, “I will be glad to encourage you and help you when I can, but *keep your eye on the cloud!*”

Troubles on the Way (Numbers chapters 11, 12)

The Murmuring of the People (Numbers chapter 11)

“We have traveled over the first ten chapters, and seen in them the illustration of the wisdom, goodness, and forethought of Jehovah, the God of Israel. But now we reach a point at which dark clouds gather around us. Up to this, God and His actings have been before us; but now we are called to contemplate man and his miserable ways. This is ever sad and humiliating. Man is the same everywhere. In Eden, in the restored earth, in the wilderness, in the millennium, man is proved to be a total failure. The very moment he moves, he breaks down.”²

No sooner had they started on their way to the long anticipated Land of Promise than they began to complain. We are not told specifically what they were grumbling about, but the trials of the trail after a year of relative inactivity, and the hardships of the desert through which they were marching, were probably involved. A grumbler can always find something to grumble about!³ The Lord not only hears His people’s prayers, He hears their grumbling also, and it does not please Him! In their case it resulted in the fire of the Lord burning among them as the outflow of His wrath.

God often revealed Himself in fire in the Old Testament. At the outset, when Moses had been called to deliver His people, He spoke to him from a burning bush. Twice God is referred to as “consuming fire.” Near the end of the forty years in the wilderness Moses encouraged them to go against the Anakim without fear by reminding them that God would fight for them. “Therefore understand today that the LORD your God is He who goes over before you as a *consuming fire*. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the LORD has said to you” (Deut. 9:3). But he informed them that the fire of the Lord could

² “Notes on Numbers” by C. H. Macintosh. Published by Loizeaux Brothers, New York. Pages 201, 202.

³ We have no excuse for falling into this trap for we have been taught, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

burn against Israel also. Warning them against idolatry, Moses reminded them, “The LORD your God is a *consuming fire*, a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24).

At the time of their march to Kadesh-barnea they had already seen Nadab and Abihu consumed when fire went out from the Lord (Lev. 10:1, 2). Now that fire consumes many of the complainers. Moses, faithful as always, prays for them - and God, in His grace, extinguishes the fire. But the fire was easier to extinguish than the people’s ingratitude. Those who have just been rescued from the fire begin to complain again, more specifically this time. “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’” (Num. 11:4 – 6).

The leaders in this ‘pity party’ are evidently from the outskirts of the camp, where the fire burned. They are called the “mixed multitude,” and are probably those who were of mixed ancestry, and thus were not encamped with the tribes of Israel, but had found their place outside the camp. Their ancestry was at least in question. Were they Israelites, Egyptians, or half-and-half? There is all too often a mixed group (hopefully not a multitude!) in our churches whose ‘ancestry’ is in question. Are they really children of God who happen to have a poor testimony? Or are they, knowingly or unknowingly, only children of Adam trying to act like Children of God? There can be no half-and-half in our spiritual ancestry! It is to this “mixed multitude” among us that Paul wrote, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5 - NASB).

The trouble began with those who were farthest from the tabernacle – where the presence of God was manifested - but quickly spread to the rest of the people. “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so *the children of Israel also* wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat?’” (Num. 11:4). Today it is often those who are the farthest from the Lord who initiate problems in the church, but what a tragic influence they exert on the rest of the congregation! “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6).

They had no reason to whimper and whine over the manna – it was bread from heaven, angel’s food! It not only was a complete and perfect diet for them, and supplied to them regularly and without fail, but it tasted good! “The taste of it was like wafers made with *honey*” (Ex. 16:31).

What had happened? Here it is said, “the taste of it was as the taste of *fresh oil*” (KJV). It seems to me that instead of eating it fresh from the hand of God they had been trying to improve it. “The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it” (v. 8). In their attempts to gain some variety in their diet they had lost the taste of honey!

We face a similar situation. Today all too many of God's people have lost their appetite for the Bread from heaven. Paul dealt with this problem among the Corinthians. "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:). Today many have left this simplicity and have come up with a tasteless, if not altogether erroneous, view of both the living and written Word of God. Their religious recipes have robbed them of the taste of honey and they no longer delight in the Lord. When this happens it is but a short step to longing for the leeks, garlic and onions they enjoyed when they were in the world. The lusting for variety takes over and there is a demand for ever more 'up to date' paraphrases of Scripture, humanistic descriptions of the 'real Jesus,' more emotionally exciting meetings, and programs that try to outdo Hollywood. Nothing is as sweet to the believing soul as a quiet and personal daily fellowship the Savior in all the beautiful simplicity of Scripture!

Their repudiation of the manna was unwarranted for another reason also. They had every reason to expect that within a few weeks at most they would have no more need for the manna, but would have a wonderfully varied diet. Just ahead of them, if they had but followed the Lord, was a land where they not only would have milk and honey but also wheat and barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and olives. They would be eating bread without scarcity, and would lack nothing (Deut. 8:8, 9)! Instead of looking back to the leeks, garlic and onions they should have been anticipating the rich diet of the Promised Land, with gratitude in their hearts to the God who was going to make it available

It is understandable why God was angry and Moses was displeased. Not only was Moses displeased – he was deeply discouraged. "Moses said to the LORD, 'Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child," to the land which You swore to their fathers?'" (Num. 11:11, 12). He was so despondent that he thought it would be more loving of the Lord to take his life than to leave him in charge of such a rebellious people. "If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now; if I have found favor in Your sight; and do not let me see my wretchedness!" (v. 15).

Once before Moses had suggested that the Lord should take his life. "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin--; but if not, I pray, *blot me out of Your book which You have written*" (Ex. 32:32). In both instances God had a better solution than death for the problems facing Moses. In Exodus His answer was, "Go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you" (Ex. 32:34). Here God's answer was, "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you" (Num. 11:16).

Earlier, soon after Israel had arrived at Sinai, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, foresaw the same problem and suggested much the same answer. "Both you and these

people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself” (Ex. 18:18). “Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves” (Ex. 18:24 – 26).

It is not clear whether this plan failed to work, or whether Moses needed more help in his present situation. There is one important difference between the proposal of Jethro and the solution God provided. Jethro suggested an organization, but God asked for a small group of recognized leaders and *put His Spirit upon them*. As today, a committee may be of great help, but it will never really meet the need fully unless it is composed of Spirit filled men. “I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone” (Num. 11:17). When God took of the Spirit that was on Moses and put it upon His helpers he did not suffer a loss. The Spirit is a person and, having the attribute of omnipresence, He was able to be in each of the men (including Moses) in all His glorious fullness. As evidence that God’s Spirit was indeed upon them they began to prophesy.

Eldad and Medad, for some undisclosed reason, did not appear around the tabernacle with the others. When they began to prophesy where they were, Joshua thought they should be silenced. Moses had a better idea. “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Num. 11:29). There is coming a day when that is exactly what God will do for His people. “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28, 29). A foretaste of that glorious day was experienced at Pentecost, but it will find its full realization, not in the church of today, but in the day when all Israel will be saved (Acts 2:16, 17; Rom. 11:26).

Having solved the problem Moses had presented, God now addresses the complaint of the people. It seems strange that Moses should ask, “Where am I to get meat to give to all these people?” He should have remembered one of the very first miracles God had wrought to meet the need for food. “I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, “At twilight you shall eat meat . . . And you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”” So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp” (Ex. 16:12, 13). This had met their need for food until the next morning when they first received the manna. In Numbers eleven it is not a need to be met, as before, but a lusting to be rebuked.

Moses may have recalled the method God had used before, but was overwhelmed with the offer of meat for so many people for a whole month. “The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.’ Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to

provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?” (Num. 11:21, 22). God’s answer was ‘short and sweet,’ as my mother used to say. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Has the Lord’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not’” (v. 23).

When the quail came flying “about two cubits above the surface of the ground” (Num. 11:31) it was easy to catch them. The people were so greedy that they gathered them in fantastic quantities and (evidently having prepared them suitably) spread them out on the ground to dry in the hot desert sun. Not only did they suffer a very severe plague before they could even swallow their first bite, and become so tired of meat that it became loathsome to them, but their journey to the Land of Promise suffered a further delay of an entire month while they learned their lesson. Another price they paid for their greed is related in the Psalms. They “lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (Psa. 106:14, 15).

There is only one safe way to get everything we want. “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psa. 37:4). When we delight ourselves in the Lord He changes our wants! We then want, above all else, to do His will. As a matter of fact God has riches more than sufficient to provide ‘wants’ that we would not even dare dream of. He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20). We are encouraged to let our request be made known unto God (Phil. 4:6), but our prayer time should not degenerate into listing our ‘wants’ or giving God His ‘orders for the day.’ It should be chiefly a time of thanksgiving for who He is, what He has already done, and what He is now doing for us – as we await *His* ‘orders for the day’ for *us*! I am sure this approach in prayer to Him will greatly alter our requests.

The Murmuring of Miriam and Aaron (Numbers chapter 12)

Moses has had his hands full with the rebelliousness of the people. At this point it was none other than his older sister and brother who rebelled. The occasion for this questioning of his authority was a wife he had taken. “Zipporah, Moses’ wife, seems to have died some time before. Marriage with a Canaanite was forbidden, but not with an Egyptian or Cushite [“Ethiopian” in NKJV]. Joseph’s wife [for instance] was an Egyptian (Gen. 41:45).”⁴

Moses had not acted against the word of God, but it seems it was, for some unspecified reason, displeasing to his sister. It may have been only an excuse for expressing her desire for ‘equal rights.’ The feminine resentment against men’s place of authority is nothing new. That Miriam, not Aaron, was the instigator of the attack is indicated both by the fact that she is mentioned first and that the chastening was decreed upon her alone.

⁴ The Amplified Bible, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. Footnote on Numbers 12:1.

Miriam had been given a place of vital service when she had a part in saving the life of her baby brother. Later she had led the women as they sang praise to God for the destruction of Pharaoh's army, and was indeed, along with her brothers, "sent before" Israel in the exodus (Micah 6:4). She was not given a place of authority, however, and perhaps an inner resentment broke out when a suitable situation came before her.

The arrogance of Aaron in this confrontation is in sharp contrast with the humility of Moses. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Whether this statement was written by Moses or added later by an editor of the text is beside the point. It is a part of the divine record and, fittingly, calls attention to the difference between Moses and his brother. Aaron has been led into a display of pride, while Moses humbly steps aside and turns the vindication of his authority over to God.

Aaron did not have the strength of character displayed by Moses. We are told that Moses was faithful in all God's house (Num. 12:7). In contrast, Aaron had, earlier, been influenced to set up an idol for Israel to worship. He had known at the time that it was wrong to worship an idol, for the Ten Commandments had but very recently been revealed to them. Here he allowed his sister to turn him against the leadership of his brother. He, more than anyone else, knew of the God-given authority bestowed upon his brother. In both cases he was just too easily led.

The preeminence of Moses is indicated by the fact that his name is used 850 times in the Bible. He was a prophet, but he was much more than a prophet - an entire dispensation had been entrusted to him. He was the revelator and administrator of the dispensation of law. All that followed his ministry in Israel until, at least, the cross, found its foundation and doctrine in his writings. At times his name is used to designate the dispensation he introduced. "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). "We are Moses' disciples. . . We know that God spoke to Moses" (John 9:28, 29). "Until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the *Old Testament [Old Covenant]*, . . . when *Moses* is read, a veil lies on their heart" (2 Cor. 3:14, 15).

To destroy his authority would have been to lose his message. He would have been justified in vigorously defending his divine commission. When he, humble man that he was, did not do so God stepped in and put an end to the defiance he faced.

In much the same way Paul became the revelator and administrator of the dispensation of grace. "The dispensation of the grace of God . . . *was given to me* for you" (Eph. 3:2). He is named 156 times in Acts and the epistles of the New Testament. This prominence is not to exalt him, but to establish and emphasize his message.

As with Moses earlier, Paul's authority was questioned, and even denied by some. Unlike Moses, he vigorously replied to his critics – taking up most of chapters ten through thirteen in Second Corinthians to do so. He was no fool in defending himself, for he was contending for his divinely appointed responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles,

and his special revelations concerning this age of grace. However he was willing to be *thought* a “fool” for the sake of his message. “I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little ... Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool; I am more” (2 Cor. 11:16, 23). He realized that if his apostleship could be discredited his message would be lost!

Some years ago I reviewed lesson plans for a year of Sunday School classes to be taught throughout much of Protestant Christendom. I was astonished to find that they were almost totally taken from the Gospels. The only lessons based on the epistles of Paul were passages dealing with some non-doctrinal issues. They had effectively ignored or rejected Paul’s authority and had surely lost his message. It is true, as Paul himself reminds us, that all Scripture is profitable, not only for “reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” but also for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16). But he told Timothy, specifically, “you have carefully followed my doctrine, ... But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom [from Paul ⁵] you have learned them” (2 Tim. 3:10, 14). It is as important for us to be ‘Pauline’ in our theology as it was for Israel to be ‘Mosaic’ in theirs.

The chastening visited upon Miriam is suggestive. Not only does the certainty, duration, and intensity of it indicate the seriousness of her offense, but the nature of it is significant. In several instances God used leprosy as a curse to reply to serious sin. The legalism of Gehazi caused him to become a leper (2 Kings 5:20 – 27), as did the pride of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16 – 21).

Paul received his gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12) and he emphasizes the seriousness of departing from it. To reject Paul’s authority, and lose his message, will bring the New Testament counterpart of leprosy upon one. “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

The progress of the people was interrupted for a week as they awaited the cleansing of Miriam. This, together with the month spent stuffing themselves with meat, delayed them five weeks on their way to the Promised Land. Finally, however, they arrived at Kadesh-barnea and were only a day’s march from their treasured goal. It was a landmark of progress, a demonstration of God’s matchless love and grace, a product of His miraculous power, and an opportunity for heartfelt gratitude and joyous expectation! It is revealing to see how they responded to that banner day!

Today, as we see the developments in the world, in our own beloved land, and even in the church, it appears that we too have come very near to our banner day. That which has been the “blessed hope” of believers for nearly two thousand years must surely

⁵ An interpretive paraphrase of 2 Tim. 3:14 – 16 could read as follows. “Continue in my teaching, remembering you have received it from me as ‘the apostle to the Gentiles.’ But don’t forget what you learned from your mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5), the Old Testament, for all Scripture – Old Testament and New Testament alike – are inspired of God!”

take place very soon. What is our response? Are we looking joyously for that blessed hope? Or are we (in this year of 1999) depressed with the situation in which the world finds itself, and quaking in our boots as the year 2,000 draws near? If those in the Tribulation are to “look up and lift up [their] heads, because [their] redemption [at the coming in glory] draws near” (Luke 21:28), how much more we should be looking up in expectation today as the Rapture approaches! It is not a time to ignore it, deny it, or put it off until after the Tribulation. We should straighten our theology here, but that is not enough. We must be daily looking for Him and longing for His coming. Our hearts should be crying out in joyous expectation, “Maranatha!”

The Rebellion

(Numbers chapters 13, 14.)

Last Minute Plans

As chapter thirteen opens God's people stand at last on the very border of the land. This has been the dream of the nation for over four hundred years. They, themselves, have had it set before them as their goal ever since they left Egypt. Moses encourages them to act at once. "Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21). They should have been grateful to the Lord for bringing them to this hour, and thrilled through and through with the expectation of marching across the border the very next day! Instead they hesitated in indecision.

God had assured them over and over that the land is good and that He will give it to them. Now they wanted a 'second opinion.' They wanted to 'check it out for themselves' and 'think about it' before making the final move.

There was no need to see "what the land is like ... good or bad ... rich or poor" (Num. 13:18 - 20). God had already told them, repeatedly, that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. There was no necessity to discover whether the people were "strong or weak ... few or many" or whether the cities were fortified or not (Num. 13:18, 19 – NASB). God had already promised *He would give them the land*. They didn't believe Him. They wanted to see for themselves and collect some evidence of its fruitfulness (Num. 13:20), then they would decide whether or not to obey God! They were actually putting their ultimate trust in man – in themselves - instead of in God.

Unfortunately their leader had set a precedent for them. As we saw in chapter ten, shortly before Kadesh-barnea Moses appears to have made the same mistake. Just before setting out on their journey He had been assured that God Himself would be their guide. The cloud hovering over the tabernacle would be used by Him to guide their every move (Num. 9:15 – 23). Surely He, as no other, would know the way. Yet, strangely, in what appears to have been a brief lapse of faith, Moses said to his brother-in-law, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as *you* know where we should camp in the wilderness, and *you* will be as eyes for us" (Num. 10:31). Now, taking a leaf out of Moses' book, the people also put their ultimate trust in man. Instead of looking up to the cloud of His presence, they were looking to a committee's report. Instead of allowing the cloud to guide *them*, they were going to guide *the cloud!*

How very important it is to be an example of what we expect from others. It is not enough to take the attitude, "Do as I say, and not as I do." We must lead the way if we expect others to follow. The story is told of a man seen pulling a long and heavy chain down the road. When asked why he was pulling the chain, he replied, "Did you ever try *pushing* one?"

Paul instructed Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:12, 16). To Titus he wrote, “In all things [show] yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Titus 2:7, 8).

But was it not God Himself who decided to halt the march and send spies into the land? The first two verses of Numbers thirteen seem to indicate it was. However when we compare other Scripture we discover a different scenario. God had already spied out the land for them. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them,¹ flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands” (Ezek 20:5, 6 – KJV).

When Moses encouraged the people to go up, without fear, and take possession of the land as the Lord had spoken, they suggested that spies be sent into the land first. “Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’ And everyone of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come’” (Deut. 1:21, 22).

Moses liked the idea and evidently acted upon it without consulting the Lord. Why didn’t he say, “Keep your eyes upon the cloud over the tabernacle. Listen for the silver trumpets. God knows what we should do and when we should do it and He will guide us and give us the land!”? Instead, he admits, “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out” (Deut. 1:23, 24).

God, accommodating Himself to their unbelief, permitted them to carry out their ill-conceived plan (Num. 13:2, 3). Later He made His opposition to it clear when He linked the time of their wanderings directly to the days spent in reconnaissance. “According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you shall know *My opposition*” (Num. 14:34 - NASB). God was saying, “For forty *days* you went your stubborn unbelieving way – and for forty *years* you will suffer the consequences!”²

We must not confuse what God *permits* us to do – even in ‘serving Him’ – with what He *desires* that we do. We are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

¹ The NASB translates this “that I had *selected* for them” – but admits in the margin that, literally, it would be “*spied out*.”

² Graciously God gave them credit for the time already spent in the wilderness, so that they had only about 38 years left to complete their ‘sentence.’ See Deut. 2:14.

works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Paul expressed his great longing to “lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). More than to ‘serve the Lord,’ he wanted to serve Him in the very place and very way that God had in mind when He saved him. He wanted to ‘follow the cloud and heed the silver trumpets’ – God’s Word and His Spirit. He longed to see God’s plan for him fulfilled in his life.

It is sadly possible for us to be ‘doing a good job’ teaching a Sunday School class, when God has a place of service for us in some far land. It is also possible to be struggling away in a far land when God has a Sunday School class in mind. How important it is to be walking in the Spirit and sensitive to His guiding hand in our lives! A chorus we used to sing when I was a young man expresses it well.

Follow, I will follow Thee my Lord,
 Follow every passing day.
 My tomorrows are all known to Thee,
 Thou wilt lead me all the way!

The Spies

The men selected to reconnoiter the land are not the same ones who, but a short time before, had been named to stand with Moses (Num. 1:4 – 16), and to present the gifts in chapter seven. Like them, however, they are chosen by name and represent the twelve tribes. It seems that in chapter one the emphasis in their choice was their relationship to the tribes – “each one head of his father’s house” (Num. 1:4). These in chapter thirteen are selected because of their leadership ability. “You shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, *every one a leader* among them.” (Num. 13:2 - NASB).

In the New Testament the twelve apostles were also chosen by name. Although they represented the twelve tribes they could not have been chosen for their membership in them, for there were several pairs of brothers among them. Brothers, of course, could not be one from one tribe and the other from another. Since they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28), they may all have been from Judah, the regal tribe. On the surface, the basis for their selection may seem to have been their ability, seen or foreseen, as leaders. Looking deeper, however, it is far more likely that they were chosen for their weaknesses. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:26 – 29).

It is noteworthy that in each case all twelve tribes must be represented. This principle is borne out elsewhere. When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, even though only the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were gathered about him, he acted in behalf of all twelve. When he built the altar he took “*twelve* stones, according to the

number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob” (1 Kings 18:31) and then poured *twelve* waterpots of water over the wood he had placed there. In the book of Judges, when the tribe of Benjamin was nearly exterminated by civil war, the elders of the congregation cried out, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel” (Judges 21:17). The lists of tribes occurring in Scripture vary from one another as to which tribes are included (Levi is missing in most of the lists and Dan is missing in at least one), but always there are twelve of them.

With this in mind, it is unthinkable that on the very day the feast of Pentecost found its fulfillment one tribe should not be represented. If Matthias, the man chosen in Acts one as the twelfth apostle, was not the legitimate replacement for Judas, as some claim, then only eleven tribes were represented there. It has been suggested that the eleven went ahead of the Lord in replacing Judas with Matthias – that God had intended to replace him later with Paul.

Paul, however, did not have the qualifications for the post, as set forth by Christ Himself. “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:27). Peter makes it even more specific. “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21, 22). Paul became a witness of the resurrection later (1 Cor. 15:8), but had not accompanied Christ from the baptism of John. He never claimed to be the legitimate replacement for Judas, even when defending his apostleship at length in Second Corinthians, chapters eleven to thirteen. He lists himself as separate from, and subsequent to, “*all* [not all the *other*] the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7 – 9). The twelve are linked to the *twelve* tribes (Matt. 19:28), while Paul is associated with the *one* Body of Christ. While he said, “I am the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9), he was least in comparison to them – not in association with them. He made it clear that he is “a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles” (Rom. 15:16), “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13). In addition, there are solid reasons to accept Matthias as the twelfth apostle.

The Spies’ “Majority Report”

During the forty wasted days when they merely marked time, waiting for the return of the spies, the entire assembly could have already been in the land. If they had believed God - watching for the movement of the cloud and with their ears attuned to the call of the silver trumpets – they would already have had some of the promised victories behind them.

When the spies finally returned they all agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey. They even brought back some grapes, pomegranates and figs as evidence. The assembly saw the fruit. Some of them, at least, must have tasted it. Surely this pleased them and brought smiles of anticipation to their faces.

Their smiles were turned to frowns however as they heard the report of ten of their delegation. “Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan. ... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us. ... The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. ... There also we saw the Nephilim ... and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (Num. 13:28, 29, 31 – 33 - NASB).

There is no mention of God in their report, as there is in the appeal of Caleb and Joshua the next day (14:7 – 9). They forget they have His promise that *He will give them the Land*. They fail to recall what happened when the entire Egyptian army had been arrayed against them, at a time when they were totally unprepared for war. At that time God had said, “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:14). As they looked on in wonder the entire Egyptian army had been destroyed before their very eyes (Ex. 14:27, 28). Seeking to encourage them to enter the land, Moses had reminded them of this. “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes’” (Deut. 1:29, 30).

Now they are trembling at the thought of the numerous Canaanite giants they will face. They forget the song they sang with Moses right after they had crossed the Red Sea. “The peoples have heard, *they tremble*; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; until Thy people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established” (Ex. 15:14 – 17 - NASB).

While the Israelites are trembling because of the Canaanites, the Canaanites are trembling for fear of Israel! As a matter of fact they were still trembling over thirty-eight years later, when Joshua faced Jericho. Rahab told the spies of that day, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. ... And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2:9 – 11).

The ten spies, and those listening to them, were seeing themselves through the eyes of the Canaanites instead of seeing the Canaanites through the eyes of God. As Donald Grey Barnhouse once put it, “The ten spies saw the giants and themselves – so

the giants looked big. The two saw the giants and GOD – so the giants looked small! You can't see God and yourself in the same glance.”

The “Minority Report”

Very frequently, today also, it is the minority - the ‘remnant’ - that stands firm for the Lord, strong in faith. Spiritual truth cannot be determined by a poll of the people – not even when the people are church leaders. A critical time in Paul’s ministry illustrates this.

In Acts fifteen Paul recalled his meeting with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. “I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2:2). God revealed to him that he should attend this meeting, but he was not afraid he had been preaching the wrong message. His concern was that the twelve might side with the legalizers. If the very apostles chosen by Christ agreed that the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved Paul would have faced such strong opposition that it would have been like beating his head against a wall to stand against it. He did not intend to get a vote on what he should preach. He was there to convince them that what he was already preaching was the truth of God for this age of grace (Gal. 2:5 – 9).

At a critical time in church history one man stood almost alone for the deity of Christ. A friend warned him, “Athanasius, the world is against you!” His reply wrote history. “Then Athanasius is against the world!” It is true that “one man – *with God* – is a majority.”

Caleb was part of a pitifully small minority, but speaking for himself and Joshua, he declared, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Unlike the ten, these two believed God. The giants posed no more of a problem to them than, later, Goliath did to David.³

Subsequent history demonstrated that Caleb was not ‘just talking.’ His faith was well founded. Forty-five years later, when he was eighty-five, he said, “Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said” (Josh. 14:12). Drive them out he did!

As we focus on our fears and worries we, too, see ourselves as grasshoppers. When our eyes are on the Lord the fears and worries become grasshoppers. It was when

³ All twelve spies had seen the same giants, and they were enormous! We are told that one of them (Og, king of Bashan) had a bed over thirteen feet long and six feet wide (Deut. 3:11). Goliath was nine and a half feet tall (1 Sam. 17:4). God later describes the Amorites for us. “It was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, though his height was like the height of cedars and he was strong as the oaks” (Amos 2:9).

Peter took his eyes off of the Lord and “saw that the wind was boisterous” that he began to sink (Matt. 14:30).

The Decision of the people

The people wept all night, feeling sorry for themselves, imagining all the tragic things that might happen, and planned to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1 – 4).

What fools unbelief can make of us! These people turn away in an agony of fear from the prospect of facing giants that God has promised He will defeat. Then they plan to return to Egypt on their own. How do they think they will get along without the manna of which they are so weary, the water from the rock, the guidance of the pillar of cloud by day or the light from the pillar of fire by night? Can they fight the Amalekites without the leadership of Joshua on the battlefield and the intercession of Moses on the top of the hill? (Ex. 17:8 – 13). How do they plan to cross the Red Sea? Do they imagine they will be received back by the Egyptians with open arms?

When we turn back from a walk of faith we do not enter on a primrose path of ease and security. We still face the problems of life, but without the Lord’s help and guidance. In addition we face the prospect of His chastening, and “no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful” even though “afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

The next morning Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the rebels pleading for their repentance. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and made a last fervent appeal to the congregation (Num. 14:5 – 9). In response, the people took up stones to slay them.

Then God spoke to Moses and Aaron. He proposed dispossessing these rebels – washing His hands of them and starting over with Moses (Num. 14:11, 12). How easily Moses could have snapped up this offer. These sons of Abraham had been a thorn in his flesh from the time he first tried to help them. They had complained and rebelled. They had accused him of many things, and now they even threaten to take his life. It would be understandable if he had said, “Thank you, Lord, for giving these rascals what they deserve,” but he didn’t. The prospect of being the progenitor of an entire nation, as Jacob had been, would be very attractive to the flesh. He could have said, “Thank you, Lord, I’m your man!” but he didn’t.

Once before God had suggested this same course of action. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation’” (Ex. 32:9, 10). Moses did not even consider the offer. Instead, he interceded on behalf of the guilty people. When he came down from the mountain, and saw for himself what the people had done, his own anger was stirring up within him. Yet he “returned to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their

sin; but if not, I pray, *blot me out of Your book which You have written*” (Ex. 32:31, 32). He was actually willing to give his own life for the wayward nation.

Moses finds himself in good company in this. Paul was willing to be lost forever if it could result in the salvation of the rebellious Jews of his day. He cried out, “I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:2, 3). Loving and generous as were the hearts of these two men, their offers of self-sacrifice were not accepted. There was One, however, whose sacrifice was accepted, and it does avail for those who believe He laid down His life for *them*. Moses and Paul both had the mind and the compassion of Christ in this matter. May God grant that we also might experience it.

As on the previous occasion, the intercession of Moses prevailed. The Lord pardoned them (Ezek. 20:13 – 17). However He determined a severe chastening upon them (Num. 14:20 – 23). The Psalmist looked back on this time and wrote, “You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds” (Psa. 99:8). All those in the first census, save only Caleb and Joshua, were to wander in the wilderness for forty years and never enter the land.

When Moses told the people of the judgment against them, and God emphasized it by taking the lives of the ten spies who had inspired their rebellion, they realized they had made a great mistake. They mourned, admitted they had sinned, and decided to “go up to the place which the Lord has promised” (Num. 14:39, 40). The Lord commanded them not to go but, heedlessly, they went up anyway. When they had heard the evil report of their spies they had feared the enemy’s power, forgetting the Lord and His power. Now they faced that powerful enemy, but without the Lord – and they were soundly defeated. They had said, “We are not able to go up against the people” (Num. 13:31) and, sure enough, they were not able!

Their ‘obedience’ was too late. Obeying God at the wrong time is disobedience! When God said “Go!” they refused. When He said “Stay where you are!” they decided to go! What they did was courageous, it was belated ‘obedience’ (in their own eyes), it was repentance (“We have sinned”) and it was no doubt carried out with zeal and determination. However it was *not faith*, it was *presumption*! Notice the dispensational applications. For instance obeying 1 Cor. 14:1 –b, 39 is not real obedience today in light of 1 Cor. 13:8, and obeying Matt. 10:5 in this age of grace is not obedience in light of Rom. 10:12.

Why did Israel turn back at the last moment?

Why had they been willing to leave their homes and flee from Egypt in the first place? There had been an ever-sharpening realization of the cruel bondage they were enduring. They had seen demonstration after demonstration of the power of God working on their behalf. Their confidence in the leadership of Moses had grown as the

days went by, and they had a glorious prospect set before them – the promise of freedom and a home of their own in a land flowing with milk and honey.

They had gone through severe testing to reach the Promised Land. They had seen God’s power and faithfulness demonstrated in bringing them at last to its very border. It seems incredible that they should hesitate to take the last step! Why did they turn back?

I recall standing on the high diving board at a swimming pool when I was a young man. I had vacillated between eager anticipation and fear as I had climbed the ladder. When I looked down to the water it seemed a mile away. The realization that if I took that next step there would be no turning back, that I would be irreversibly committed, overwhelmed me, and I turned back! Israel had this very natural reaction at Kadesh-barnea.

That was the problem. It was a *natural reaction*. It was not *action*, based on *faith*! God had told them that the land was a good land. The oft-repeated expression, “a land of milk and honey” was only an epitome of what He had revealed to them about Palestine. Moses had never seen the land, yet he knew a great deal about it. He was able to describe it in some detail to those who would be entering it. “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deut. 8:7 – 9). *They didn’t believe it*; they had to see for themselves.

God had often promised them that He would give them the land. “To you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father” (Gen. 26:3). “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it. And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” ’ ” (Ex. 33:1, 2). *They didn’t believe it*, they had to send in spies to see how *they* could do it.

While lack of faith was the basic cause of the rebellion, as we will note more fully later, there are some practical considerations that contributed to it.

They had a severe case of mental myopia as they looked back to their past. They recalled the bondage in Egypt as the ‘good old days.’ In their near sightedness they remembered sitting by the pots of meat and eating bread to the full (Ex. 16:3). They even came to the place, later, where they described *Egypt* as a land flowing with milk and honey! (Num. 16:13). But they forgot their lives had been made bitter with the hard labor in mortar and bricks that was rigorously imposed on them (Ex. 1:16, 22 - NASB). They did not remember the agony of seeing their newborn sons slain before their eyes (Ex.

1:16, 22). They also failed to recall the way God had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself (Ex. 19:4).

When we look into the rear view mirror of our lives it is important to focus on the right things. When Paul said, “forgetting those things which are behind” (Phil. 3:13) he meant we should not dwell on our former accomplishments, lest we rest on our laurels, or our past failures, lest we be overwhelmed with discouragement. His recollections centered on the right things. He gloried in what Christ had done for him, and in him, in his past, and twice recounted his conversion at length (Acts 22:3 – 21 and 26:9 – 23). His main focus, however, was the future. “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13, 14). With his eyes on the crowns to be had at the Rapture, he was able to fight the good fight and finish the race (2 Tim. 4:7). There was no Kadesh-barnea for Paul.

The Israelites' view of what lay ahead was as heavily flawed as their recall of the past. When the ten spies brought the evil report they confessed that God had been right about the land – it was a good land! This aspect of the report was totally ignored in the response of the people. They saw only the giants! They need not have ignored the adversaries, but their attention should have been centered on the hope set before them.

Paul faced more opposition than any of us will ever face. But he once said, “A wide door for effective service has opened to me, *and* there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9 - NASB). Notice he did not say “*But* there are many adversaries”! That one word spelled the difference between success and failure in his ministry. In the report of the ten spies they said, in effect, “Yes, the land certainly does flow with milk and honey, *but* --” and from this time on not one more word is said about the good land, either by the ten spies or the people. They were totally occupied with the adversaries! The *certainty* that the land was good was pushed aside by the *possibility* of defeat. The *assurance* by God that He would give it to them was buried under the *suggestion* by mere men that they faced disaster. No wonder they wept all night!

We, too, have much that could cause us to weep all night – every night! Natural resources are becoming exhausted, weather patterns have changed drastically, useable farmland is decreasing as the population explodes -- and the environmentalists will be unable to do a thing about it in spite of all their frantic efforts. The political situation, world wide, is all but asking for the entrance of the antichrist on the scene. Wars are epidemic, and famine engulfs major parts of the globe. Gross immorality is becoming the life style of even our own land, and the religious situation is rapidly leading up to the prophesied, satanically inspired, ‘world church,’ with little or no hope of a last minute revival.

What are we to do? As believers we are to be aware of the ‘giants’ but keep our eyes on the Lord and remember we have a blessed hope! We are not existing in dread of the ‘end of the world,’ but living in expectation of a blessed eternity with the Lord in heaven. We are not looking for the antichrist, but for Christ. We will be caught up to be

with the Lord before the Tribulation begins – and we should thankfully ponder that blessed hope every time the ‘giants’ loom before our eyes! It is sad that at the very time when the Rapture appears to be very near indeed, it is being denied, postponed into, or following, the Great Tribulation -- or simply ignored and forgotten! Our cry, as we lift our eyes heavenward, should be “Maranatha!” – “Our Lord cometh!”

Another thing, which predisposed Israel to turn back at Kadesh-barnea, was their pattern of unbelief, discontent, fear and rebellion they had been establishing ever since Moses had arrived on the scene to lead them out of Egypt. “At Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath. Likewise, when the LORD sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice” (Deut. 9:22, 23). “All these men ... have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these *ten times*, and have not heeded My voice” (Num. 14:22). John Hubbard, one of our teachers in Bible school, told us, “What you will be, you are now becoming.” Israel had been practicing for their ‘opening night’ for over three years, and it went over with a bang! If we live by faith and walk in the Spirit in the daily routine of life, we will find it much easier to triumph when the great tests come upon us.

One excuse they used for turning back was the fear that their wives and children would be killed. It has been said that an excuse is “the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.” Love for family is commendable, but here it was used as an excuse rather than a reason. Did they really think they loved their children more than God did? Did they imagine they could protect them better than the God who had spared their firstborn in Egypt? In their plan to return to Egypt did they not recall that it was there they had been forced to cast their newborn sons into the Nile?

When we were contemplating going to the Philippines as missionaries I was, understandably I think, deeply concerned about our children. The missionary who had begun the work there had lost an eleven-year-old daughter because of the primitive medical service available at that time. We would be taking four of our children with us. “What if one or more of them should die?” my heart kept asking.

Within the compass of one week two things happened that answered my question. In my Bible reading I had come to Numbers fourteen and there I read of the Israelites who said, “Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?” (Num. 14:3). God’s reply to them seemed to speak to my very situation. “Your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness” (Num. 14:31, 32). Then one morning, a few days later, I heard of an acquaintance of mine that had taken his family to the beach over the weekend. His son had climbed up on some rocks and then fallen into the sea and was drowned. “I could lose a child here as well as there,” I told myself. “I must trust them into His hands wherever we are.”

My eldest son did very nearly lose his life in the Philippines, but he also came extremely close to a fatal accident after he returned to the States to attend Bible College. The Lord spared him both times, for which I am very thankful. But I am grateful also that the Lord didn't allow me use his safety as an excuse to keep me from the most blessed ministry I have ever experienced!

The greatest reason of all for their tragic decision, and the thing that was behind all the other reasons, was their lack of faith. Their experience at Kadesh is conspicuously missing in Hebrews eleven, the 'faith chapter'! "They despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the LORD. Therefore He raised up His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness" (Psa. 106:24 – 26). "They ... entered not in because of unbelief" (Heb. 4:6 KJV).

As we think about Israel at Kadesh we do well to take heed to the lessons they can teach us. As we list their failures we can respond with a catch phrase often used by our teen-agers today, "Been there! Done that!" We have an assured prospect more glorious than a land flowing with milk and honey set before us. So let us not become engaged in fond retrospect, while looking ahead in dread. Let us live by faith, walking in the Spirit, looking forward eagerly to being with the Lord – and try to take as many as possible with us.

God's Judgment⁴ against Israel at Kadesh-barnea

When we recall how often God had 'put up with' this people's unbelief and disobedience we may wonder why He doomed an entire generation to death when finally He had managed to bring them to the very doorstep of their goal. Why had He not accepted their repentance, judged the leaders in the rebellion, as He had done before, and welcomed their renewed determination to go into the land?

"Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it" (Num. 14:22, 23). This record stands as a solemn warning that, though God is longsuffering, His patience does have an end. Their refusal to boldly claim what God had so graciously provided was 'the last straw.' God finally said, in effect, "You have had it!"

The marvel is that He didn't do this sooner. They had been thinking lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience – and were storing up wrath for themselves (Rom. 2:4, 5).⁵ Finally the wrath they had been storing up came crashing in upon them.

⁴ This was not a penal judgment. Israel, as a nation, was a redeemed people and this, severe as it was, was a chastening (Deut. 8:2, 5).

⁵ The passage in Romans has the wrath against the lost in view. However the principle involved reaches into the area of chastening also.

This generation had been born and raised in Egypt. They had been brought out of Egypt but, evidently, Egypt had not been brought out of them. Their eyes had often looked longingly back to Egypt and they were acting like Egyptians. A new generation, most of them raised under the guidance and care of God and His appointed representatives, would be better able to face the battles ahead for possession of the land.

Thoughtlessly they had ‘prayed’ for the very judgment pronounced against them. “And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, ‘-- If only we had died in this wilderness!’” (Num. 14:2). Now they receive their answer. “Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘*just as you have spoken* in My hearing, *so I will do to you*: the carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness’” (Num. 14:28, 29). This reminds us of another ‘prayer’ that God answered, much to the dismay of those uttering it. When Pilate cried out, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it,” the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:24, 25). They did not realize it, but what they said *in God’s hearing* amounted to a prayer. Later when Peter and those with him accused the Jewish leaders of murdering Christ they forgot that in their wicked prayer they had taken the responsibility for Christ’s death upon themselves. They responded, “You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend *to bring this Man’s blood on us!*” (Acts 5:28). We should be careful what *we* speak in God’s hearing. He might give us what we ask for!

Typically, God provided for us a vivid illustration of the truth that the Canaan rest does not come through Moses and the law, but through Joshua (the Old Testament form of the name “Jesus”) and the crossing of Jordan. We will discuss this in some detail later.

It is comforting to see God’s graciousness to the rebellious nation during the following thirty-eight years. Kadesh-barnea was not the end of their rebelliousness. God later recalled, “For *forty years* I *loathed* that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways” (Psa. 95:10 – NASB). Even though the judgement was final, it was graciously administered. Though He loathed this particular generation of Israelites, He still loved Israel as a nation.

This generation that God loathed was not executed on the spot, as they deserved (Num. 14:11, 12). He allowed them to continue with their families as long as they behaved themselves. Their deaths over the following thirty-eight years, in addition to those who died of old age, evidently came as a result of further acts of rebellion, as illustrated in Numbers 16:32, 35, 49; 25:9. They bore and raised children who would go into the land. This was a practical necessity, of course, since the new generation had to have a family to care for them as they grew up to maturity - until they were capable subduing the Canaanites. It was, nevertheless, gracious on His part (Num. 14:19).

He even continued His watch-care over them during those years. They had the tabernacle with the Shekinah Glory still resident over the Mercy Seat. They evidently did not appreciate this, for they did not fully avail themselves of its ministries. “Then God

turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship...’ ” (Acts 7:42, 43).

Moses and Aaron continued with them as their leaders, though they didn’t appreciate this either. Soon after the rebellion at Kadesh they turned against them and their leadership! “They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’” (Num. 16:3).

He also continued to guide them with the cloud by day and provide light from the pillar of fire at night. The manna was provided daily and He met their need for water. Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell (Deut. 8:4). “Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell” (Neh. 9:19 – 21).

In considering God’s graciousness during the years they were wandering around in circles and getting nowhere we need to remember that the judgment did not affect their individual salvation. There were many among them, including Aaron and Moses, who were justified men. They went through chastening, but were not lost eternally. God does, upon occasion, bring physical death upon those who, spiritually – and by His grace - will live forever.

Paul speaks of those in Corinth who had been chastened with sickness and even death. But they were believers, for God does not chasten someone else’s children (Heb. 12:6 – 8). Paul specifically says they were chastened that they might not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:29 – 32). He also wrote to them about one man in the congregation whom he had delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).

This assurance of continuing salvation for the true believer, even when sin overtakes him, is certainly no encouragement to continue in sin however, for the chastening can be very severe – as the Israelites found out when they wandered around in the barren desert until they died.

THE AFTERMATH

(Chapters fifteen through nineteen)

The Message of Moses to the ‘Teen-agers’ in Israel (Numbers fifteen)

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “*When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, ---*”’” (Num. 15:1, 2). “*When you come into the land to which I bring you, . . . When you eat of the bread of the land,*” (Num. 15:18, 19).

The very first message God had for Israel after Kadesh–barnea was a bittersweet revelation. It was bitter for all those men over twenty, for they surely realized it was not for them! When the land was finally entered their bodies would be resting in sandy graves. It must have been sweet indeed to the teen-agers, for it was God’s assurance that, in spite of the failure of their parents and the judgment against them, God was going to keep His promise that their children would enter the land. He did not say, “*If* you enter the land,” but “*when* you enter it,” not “*If* you eat of the bread of the land,” but “*when*”! They realized that as a consequence of their parents’ rebellion they would spend many years in the wilderness, but they had a hope set before them that would ease the pain and bitterness of the long delay. They *would*, at last, feast on milk and honey! They would be sustained by this material, but nonetheless real, “blessed hope.”

These young people were not to change or ‘modernize’ the covenant under which their parents had failed so miserably, but they were to do a better job of keeping it than they had. There is little or nothing in this chapter that is not covered in Exodus or Leviticus, except the instructions concerning how they are to treat the strangers (“aliens” – NASB) who will be living among them. For a treatment of the typical significance of these offerings a study of Leviticus is suggested. It is worthy of note, however, that much covered in the first thirty-one verses of this chapter would be hard to carry out before they enter the land. Fine flour, oil, and wine would be difficult to obtain in the desert.

The consideration of strangers who would sojourn with them looks on to their lives in Palestine. The strangers are to follow the same laws as the Israelites. “One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.” (Num. 15:15, 16). This evidently assumes that the strangers will become proselytes, and keep the Law of Moses. Salvation is to be “of the Jews” (John 4:4). The strangers will be subject to God’s chastening (Num. 15:26), but they will also share in His forgiveness (Num. 15:30).

What a departure from this program is found in our day! Then salvation was of the Jews, and the strangers had to become proselytes to Judaism. Today, as even Peter admitted, the Jews must be saved “in the same manner” as the Gentiles – the “strangers” (Acts 15:11).

That God's law was not to be taken lightly was demonstrated when a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32 – 36). Many passages, including Exodus 35:2, taught that work was forbidden on the Sabbath, but only one verse related, even indirectly, to gathering sticks on that day (Ex. 35:3). Gathering a few sticks, when he had probably not yet built a fire, and with only one verse touching on the matter, may have seemed an insignificant matter. But, wisely, they sought God's verdict in the case (Num. 15:34). His judgment reminded them again that the Law was a ministration of death.

Crossing the Jordan was not going to deliver them from the harsh realities of the Law of Moses – even though, as it turned out later, Moses would no longer be among them to enforce it.

In verses thirty-seven through forty-one God graciously directs them to place tassels on the corners of their garments. These were not to be for mere ornamentation, but to remind them to remember and obey God's commandments. Thoughtful as this provision was, it falls far short of what He will one day do for redeemed Israel. In the day when all Israel will be saved He will not be satisfied to merely remind them to do His will, He will *cause* them to do it! "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and you *will* keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:26, - 28).

The above passage in Ezekiel does not have this age of grace in view. However, when we come to Christ, we do enjoy - by grace - a generous sampling of what Israel will one day enjoy because God promised it to them. There are some differences however. We have the heart of flesh instead of stone but, sadly, we also still have the fleshly nature. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but He does not *cause* us to do God's will. Rather He *enables* us to do it when we walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh (Gal. 5:16). It will indeed be wonderful when God finally *causes* Israel to do His will. When that occurs, during the millennium, their battle will be over and the victory won. But when that takes place their opportunity to win rewards will be past. Medals of honor are not awarded for marching in the victory parade! Today we are still in the battle and there are rewards to be won! In our warfare it is not our garb, no matter how plain or how fancy, that reminds us to do God's will. It is the Word of God in our minds and the Spirit of God in our hearts that will be our constant and effective reminders.

The Rebellion of Korah (Numbers chapter sixteen)

In chapter fifteen God did what He could to assure Israel that – in spite of their rebellion and the resulting chastening – He had not cast away His people. Moses had told Pharaoh a couple of years before that Israel was His son. This chastening was solid proof of it (Heb. 12:4 – 8). One of the proverbs Solomon wrote much later would have been apropos at this time. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11, 12). While they were, indeed, not finding their discipline joyful,

but painful, they should have been willing to be “trained” by it so they could profit from the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Instead of becoming “partakers of [God’s] holiness” (Heb. 12:10), they became bitter and descended into an orgy of self-pity, blaming everyone but themselves for their plight. They exhibited no gratitude toward Moses for the many times he had saved them by his intercession on their behalf. Perhaps they did not know how close they had come to extinction or - if Moses had told them - they didn’t believe it. They have come to the conclusion that what they need is new leadership.

Does this sound familiar? How many times has a carnal and unresponsive congregation tried to prop up a sagging ministry by replacing their Board, or firing their pastor? New leaders may, at times, be helpful, but no matter how talented and gifted they may be, a change in leadership is no substitute for a church on its knees.

Let us follow the action as the passage reveals it to us. Three days of high drama and terrifying judgments unfold before our eyes before it is over.

On **day one** (Num. 16:1 – 17) the trouble broke forth. First *Korah* lead the attack on the *authority of Moses and Aaron* (v. 3), then *Dathan and Abiram* assaulted the *character of Moses* (vs. 13, 14). **Day two** (vs. 18 – 40) was a day of furious Judgments. On **day three** (vs. 41 – 50) the *entire congregation* accused Moses and Aaron of being *murderers* - responsible for the death of the rebels the day before.

Dathan, Abiram and On, all from the tribe of Reuben, and two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation as a whole, became involved in this new defiance. This was quite an imposing delegation, evidently composed of the strongest leaders and most respected men in Israel. Probably it was the influence of these very men that had encouraged the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. As influential as these leaders were, this onslaught against Moses and Aaron was evidently instigated by Korah, a Levite and Kohathite (Num. 16:1, 2). He had enlisted the backing of these leaders from the various tribes under the enticing banner of ‘equal rights for all’ (Num. 16:3). He was promoting a simple ‘democracy’ to replace the leadership of Moses and Aaron (and the priests who were the sons of Aaron).

Since Christ has not yet begun His reign as King of kings, democracy is the most satisfactory form of human government today. Even in the political realm, however, democracy will only work to advantage in a basically godly society - as we are finding out to our sorrow. But Israel did have a King. They didn’t realize it, for He was not visibly sitting on a throne in their presence. He was their King nevertheless, as other Scripture attests. Later when Balaam described the camp of Israelites he declared, “The shout of a King is among them!” (Num. 23:21). Also, when Israel finally demanded a human king, God told Samuel, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). The rejection of the leadership of Moses and Aaron here in the wilderness amounted to a rejection of God as their King!

Korah incited the leadership of the tribes to declare, “All the congregation is holy, every one of them” (Num. 16:3). It is instructive to see just who considered themselves

“holy.” It was the same people who turned back at Kadesh-barnea: an “evil congregation” (Num. 14:27), a people who would have been destroyed “as one man” (Num. 14:15) if Moses had not interceded, a congregation that, even then, were wandering in the wilderness because of their sin. A proverb of Solomon describes them well. “There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). They were much like the Corinthians who prided themselves on their spirituality (1 Cor. 14:37) while, in reality, they were carnal - just babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1 – 3).

In spite of his public declaration for a ‘classless society’ it appears that Korah’s real purpose was to exalt the Levites to the priesthood that had been restricted to the sons of Aaron. They had been warned against this earlier (Num. 4:18 – 20). Moses rebuked him for resorting to this ‘power play.’ “Then Moses said to Korah, ‘Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And *are you seeking the priesthood also?*’ ” (Num. 16:8 – 10). Korah was not a son of Aaron but, like Moses and Aaron, he was a Levite and also a Kohathite. The Kohathites had been given the very highest responsibility short of the priesthood. They were the ones who were entrusted with the exalted responsibility of hand-carrying the glorious furniture of the tabernacle. As all too often happens, the honor bestowed on them led to pride, and the pride fostered a lust for even higher honors.

It is this tendency of the flesh that Paul had in mind when he wrote, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business” (1 Thess. 4:11 - NASB). “The original expression is almost equivalent to ‘Be ambitious to be unambitious,’ ” as the footnote in W. J. Conybeare’s translation of this verse puts it. Not that we are to be lazy, but that we are to avoid the selfish pursuit of recognition, power, wealth, fame, and so forth. After urging us to present our bodies a living sacrifice to serve Christ, Paul issues a warning we dare not ignore. “I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). Faithfulness in conducting our “own business” – that for which God has given us the needed “measure of faith” - is greatly needed. God can do without the kind of ‘ambition’ noted here in those who carry on His work!

When Korah organized his ‘demonstration,’ and arrogantly faced Moses and Aaron with his accusations, he shouted, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3). Moses fell on his face in shock and despair at this new evidence of rebellion in Israel. “*You* take too much upon *yourselves*, you sons of Levi!” he answered (Num. 16:7), and then arranged for a test to see who really belonged to God and was truly holy.

The issue was clear – did the leadership remain with Moses and Aaron, or would it be turned over to the congregation, and the leaders they put forth? He set forth a test

that left the decision in God's hands. Since only the priests could offer incense, that was made the touchstone of the test. "[Moses] spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, 'Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!'" (Num. 16:5 – 7).

The terms of the test should have put these men in fear for their lives, for God had displayed His rejection of Nadab and Abihu, when they had offered incense with strange fire, by taking their lives – even though they were priests! (Lev. 10:2). Now these who are not even priests are directed to make themselves censers, put fire in them, and see if they will fare better than Nadab and Abihu.

Dathan and Abiram were also summoned to be present the next day (Num. 16:12). They not only refused to appear, they launched a verbal attack against the very character of Moses. They accused him of deceiving them with false promises of a land of plenty and luring them into the wilderness - usurping authority over them – just so he could kill them there. "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey [their idealized recollection of Egypt!], to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? [Will you seek to prevent them from seeing your guilt?] We will not come up!" (Num. 16:13, 14).

These men were not even Levites, much less sons of Aaron, yet their charges are even more vicious than those of Korah. Moses became angry and prayed that the Lord would not recognize them as His, even if, and when, they brought offerings to Him. He then reminded Korah and his followers, along with Aaron, to gather before the Lord with their censers and incense the next day.

The **second day** of defiance (16:18 – 40) was a busy day! When the two hundred and fifty had assembled at the doorway of the tabernacle the glory of the Lord appeared to them all, but He was not on speaking terms with all of them. He spoke only to Moses and Aaron and warned them to separate themselves from the others so He could consume them instantly. Only the prayers of Moses and Aaron spared the lives of these insolent characters. Incense in Scripture is symbolic, or typical, of prayer. Here the incense from two hundred and fifty censers availed nothing. It was the prayers of but two men appointed and authorized by God that prevailed.

In answer to the prayers – the verbal 'incense' of Moses and Aaron - God turned from his threat to consume the congregation. He had not turned from his wrath against the bearers of incense or the perpetrators of the revolt however. He instructed Moses to "speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'" Then Moses went to Dathan and Abiram, followed by the elders of Israel.

Addressing the congregation that had gathered there he said, “Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins” (16:24 – 26).

Dathan and Abiram defiantly stood in the doorways of their tents with their entire families. “And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD’” (Num. 16:28 – 30).

The resulting judgment must have been nearly as terrifying as the darkness and earthquake centuries later, when Christ was crucified. The very ground under the feet of the assembled Israelites must have shaken violently as the earth opened up and swallowed at least two families alive.¹ “Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly” (16:31 – 33). The onlookers watched in terror as they saw their friends drop from sight and heard their screams of anguish. It is no wonder that they fled and said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!”

At about the same time that the earth was swallowing Dathan and Abiram “a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense” (16:35). The incense offered by so many self appointed ‘worshippers’ did not avail. They died in the very midst of the smoke from their censers.

Those offering the incense were not “holy” as had been claimed for them – their bodies were lying lifeless before the tabernacle. The censers they had used, however, were holy, for they had been presented before the Lord. They were salvaged for the Lord’s use. He directed that they be “hammered out as a covering on the altar” (v. 39). It is not clear whether the Altar of Incense or the bronze altar, where the animals were sacrificed, is in view. Since the covering was to be “a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD,” it seems logical that the Altar of Incense is intended. Also, unless the censers contained a considerable amount of bronze it would be difficult to construct anything of sufficient size to cover the much larger altar of sacrifice.

¹ The other leader of the rebellion, On, is not mentioned here. Everyone was warned to stay back from the tents of all three of the other men (v. 24), but in the next verse Moses went only to the tents of Dathan and Abiram. “All of the men who belonged to Korah” (NASB) were swallowed up, but it is not clear whether Korah himself shared their fate, or was slain with those who were offering incense. We are told later that the sons of Korah, unlike those of Dathan and Abiram, were not killed (Numbers 26:11).

The cover would not be over the Altar of Incense while it was in use in the tabernacle, but would be placed on top of the other coverings, designated earlier, when it was being transported. Thus those Israelites who were not priests, and were not allowed to see the Altar of Incense when it was in place in the tabernacle, could observe it covered with bronze when it was being carried by the Kohathites. Whenever they came close enough to see it they would be reminded that they must keep their distance, that for them to offer incense was a very important ‘No-No.’

On the **third day** the entire congregation accused Moses and Aaron of manslaughter. “On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against them, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the LORD’” (Num. 16:41). It almost seems they could hardly wait to be judged, as the others had been just the day before! Much as they may have mourned the passing of so many of their leaders, they had no reason to blame Moses and Aaron. Moses had pointed out to them that the fate decreed for Dathan and Abiram would be of such a nature that they could not be blamed. “And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me’” (Num. 16:28, 29). The deaths of the two hundred and fifty ‘worshippers’ came about through a fire from the Lord, not by any human instrumentality. As a matter of fact, they would all have perished the day before if Moses and Aaron had not prayed for them.

The assembled Israelites so aroused the anger of the Lord that again He proposed slaying them all. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment’” (Num. 16:45). While almost fifteen thousand did die of the plague that God sent upon them, the rest were spared as Aaron stood between the living and the dead with incense rising from his censer.

Two hundred and fifty censers had not protected their bearers from the fire of the Lord the day before, but here only one censer brought the plague to a conclusion. They had complained about Aaron being the one to burn incense – but it was Aaron burning incense that turned away God’s wrath from the entire congregation! Since the incense from the censers is symbolic – typical of prayer ascending to God as a sweet aroma – this dramatic incident has much to teach us about prayer.

Many people praying (or one reciting many prayers) may not accomplish what one prayer can bring about, just as two hundred and fifty censers could not prevail – while one censer did. In prayer it is not quantity, but quality that counts. We are not heard for our many words (Matt. 6:7). One thing that can kill a prayer meeting is to have the same requests uttered, even in much the same words at times, by each one in the ‘prayer circle.’ When one member of the group ‘leads in prayer’ it is assumed that each of the others is saying ‘amen’ in their hearts to that request. Unless something additional needs to be presented to the Lord on that topic, someone else leading the same group with basically the same prayer is “vain repetition” as much as the redundancy of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is in some circles.

There is nothing wrong with prayer to the true God – just as the censers were holy, even in the hands of unholy men. But prayer has its limitations. It is, in itself, not a cure-all. The oft-heard profession, “I believe in prayer” doesn’t go far enough. It misses the mark as the statement of adequate and true faith. Those who believed in incense died even while the incense was rising majestically from the censers in their hands.

Not only the existence, but the content, of prayer, is critical. The incense offered by the protesters could have been verbalized somewhat as follows. “Show Moses his pride and presumption, God, and put *us* in the place of prominence and power over the people.” Compare the self-exalting prayer of the Pharisee (it is said of him “thus he prayed *with himself*”!) with the self-effacing plea of the tax collector in Luke 18:10 – 14. It was not the Pharisee, but the lowly and despised publican, who went forth justified.

Several questions arise in regard to the content of our prayers. Are we to pray for the unsaved? It has been said, “Paul asks us to preach to the lost and pray for the saints, but we preach to the saints and pray for the lost.” This holds true as to the *emphasis* of Scripture. However Paul asks us to pray for all men, including those who have authority over us, for God desires that all men should be saved (1 Tim. 2:1 – 4). He set the example when he prayed for Israel – *that they might be saved* (Rom. 10:1).

Should we pray only for spiritual needs? It is true that the great majority of Paul’s references to prayer have to do with spiritual needs. The reason for this is not that we are to avoid praying about temporal matters, but that we need no prompting to pray for these matters. We do, however, need to be urged and reminded to pray for the spiritual needs. Just listen to the requests in most prayer meetings! Health, wealth and safety usually almost crowd out the kind of prayers Paul describes in his letters.

Should we then avoid praying for physical needs? Let Paul answer in his own words. “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, *that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe* –” (Rom. 15:30, 31). “Be anxious for nothing, but *in everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, *let your requests be made known to God*” (Phil. 4:6). “Prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that *through your prayers I shall be granted to you*” (Philemon 22).

The character of the one who is offering the prayer is important to God also. James touches on this point very clearly. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Although God is omniscient and knows every word of every prayer uttered, He *chooses not to hear* many of them. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it *cannot* hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He *will not* hear” (Isa. 59:1, 2). In contrast, Israel is assured that during the Millennium - when they will all be saved and caused to walk in His statutes and observe His ordinances (Ezek. 36:27) - God will always hear them. “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isa. 65:24).

The motivation for prayer is important as well. The fire used for the censers symbolizes this. The flame on the Bronze Altar was initially ignited when fire came out from before the Lord (Lev. 9:24), and it was never allowed to go out (Lev. 6:13). This was to be the source of any fire used in the censers (Num. 16:46). Nadab and Abihu offered incense before the Lord had ignited the blaze on the Bronze Altar. Instead of awaiting instructions from the Lord on the matter they used their own “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1 – KJV) and fire came out from the Lord and slew them. Just as the flame for the censers had to come from the Bronze Altar, all true motivation for prayer must come, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, from the cross – which the Bronze Altar typified.

There are many false motivations for prayer. Prayer offered to impress people is condemned by Christ (Matt. 6:5, 6). The Pharisee in the temple failed to impress God with his prayer (Luke 18:14). Prayer offered to gain that which we can consume upon our lusts will not avail (James 4:3). Prayer offered in meaningless repetition, just because it is part of a required ritual, is useless (Matt. 6:7). These are only a few examples of the ‘strange fire’ that we must avoid as we offer our ‘incense’ – our prayers – to the Lord.

Should unbelievers pray? It is true, they do not have the access to God that has been purchased for the believers (Rom. 5:2). However what God decides to do about this matter on an individual basis is totally up to God’s sovereign choice. There is at least one clear example of God hearing and appreciating, and responding to, the prayers of an unsaved man. Cornelius was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). None of these things saved him. But God did hear his prayers (Acts 10:4) and responded as He saw fit. Cornelius had to hear the word of God before he could believe to the salvation of his soul, and the angel told him to send for Peter who would tell him “words by which *you* and all your household *will be saved*” (Acts 11:14).

In contrast Saul of Tarsus had been, as a strict Pharisee, *saying prayers* all his life, but it was only after he had been converted that the Lord said to Ananias, “Behold, he is *praying!*” (Acts 9:11). Lacking specific and clear revelation on a topic, we cannot put God in a box of our own making as to what He can or cannot do.

Aaron’s Rod (Numbers chapter seventeen)

The rebellion of Korah has been put down and the leaders of the insurrection have been destroyed. The authority of both Moses and Aaron has been upheld and the Levites have been frustrated in their play to take over the priesthood. The spirit of rebellion is still alive and well however, as the outbreak the very next day indicated.

Knowing that the people will continue, from time to time, to turn against His leaders God sought to give them an answer that will remain ever before them and, hopefully, be a preventive measure.

The Lord asked Moses to instruct the people to have a representative of each tribe select a rod and write their name on it. “You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; *thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you*” (Num. 17:3 – 5).

When the rods were recovered the next day they were still dead rods except for that of Aaron. His rod had not only blossomed, it had born ripe almonds! Aaron's priesthood was vindicated by a manifestation of life out of death. The rod was then put back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that their complaints might be put away from before God, lest they die (Num. 17:10). Later Aaron's rod was actually placed within the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments (Heb. 9:1 – 4).

All of this looks forward to Christ. The ‘resurrected’ rod established Aaron's place as God's choice to be High Priest. So Christ, in resurrection, became a High Priest after the order of Melchizedec “according to the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16).

The resurrection of Christ declares Him to be “the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). It sets Him apart from all other ‘religious leaders’ who have ever appeared on the world's scene. The other leaders lived their lives, had their say, gathered followers around them, and established their religions – but *they are dead!* **Christ lives!**

The resurrection of Christ is unanswerable evidence that what He did at Calvary has fully met every demand of God's holiness. All the sins of the entire world were laid on Him. If even one of those sins was not fully paid for on the cross, He would have continued in the grave. He was “delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Just as the reality of our offenses was the basis of His being delivered up to die as our substitute, so the perfection of the justification accomplished at Calvary was the basis for His resurrection. Christ had cried out, “It is *finished,*” and died. The Father responded with, “It is *enough!*” and raised Him from the dead.

It is because of this consideration that the resurrection was made a necessary part of the gospel by which we are saved (1 Cor. 15:1 – 4). This is why Paul tells us that men must believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, if they want to be saved (Rom. 10:9). It explains the prominence of the resurrection in the preaching of the apostles – including Paul (Acts 17:18; 1 Cor. 15:12 – 17).

The resurrection is also the basis for the believer's assurance that their salvation is secure. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His [resurrection] life” (Rom. 5:10). “Therefore He is also able to save *to the uttermost* those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He

who began the good work, in saving us from our sins, will be there to complete it – right up to and including the day He comes for us in the air (Phil. 1;6).

As we will see when we study chapter thirty-five of Numbers, the Israelite who had been guilty of manslaughter, when he fled to a “city of refuge,” was safe as long as the High Priest lived. Christ is both our city of refuge and our High Priest – and *He will never die!* Praise the Lord.

Resolution of the Priest versus Levite Dispute (Numbers chapter eighteen)

The rift between the priests and the Levites that was displayed in the rebellion of Korah against Aaron needs to be resolved. The insurrection was put down in Numbers sixteen with the death of Korah and his cohorts. The divinely appointed authority of Aaron was established in chapter seventeen with the budding of Aaron’s rod. Now steps are taken to forestall further friction between priests and Levites. This is the topic of chapter eighteen.

First of all, Aaron must realize that the authority he has been granted brings serious responsibility. “Then the LORD said to Aaron: ‘You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood’” (Num. 18:1). James calls our attention to the same principle. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). In government, authority without proper recognition of responsibility breeds tyranny. It can come close to that in the Lord’s work also.

Also, if peace and productivity are to be preserved the work for which each group is responsible must be clearly defined. ‘Good fences make good neighbors’ - and clearly defined responsibilities make good co-laborers. Verses three to seven address this need. The Levites have their tasks to perform, but they are not to infringe on those delegated to the priests – lest they die! “I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider [anyone who is not a priest] who comes near shall be put to death” (verse 7).

Today we do not each have a detailed ‘job description,’ as did the priests and Levites, but we are urged to “think soberly” as to what our particular area of service is. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). This was the error of Aaron and Miriam in one instance and of Korah in another. Much confusion and strife could be avoided if we carefully followed Paul’s dictum.

God reminds the priests that the Levites are not their adversaries, or their slaves – they are God’s gift to them to help in their ministry (verse 6). The priests are not to infringe upon the ministry of the Levites either, for the priests have their own ministry as another gift from God (verse 7).

We also need to recognize that the ministry of others is not intended to be in competition with ours, but to supplement and strengthen it – their service is *our* gift from

God. When each saint is carrying on the ministry God has given to him, and appreciates the ministries of others, the work of the Lord can flourish in peace.

The priests are assured of a bountiful provision for their needs (verses 8 – 19). They are to be supported from their work (Compare 1 Cor. 9:14). “This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you” (Num. 18:9, 10). The firstborn of man and of unclean animals – that cannot be sacrificed – are to be redeemed with silver, and the silver will be theirs as well (verses 15, 16).

Great as the position and authority of Aaron was, he – like the rest of the Levites – would have no inheritance in the land (verse 20).

The Levites are to be supported also – from the tithes of the people (vs. 21 – 29). Then they are, in turn, to support the priests with their tithe – a “tithe of the tithe” (verse 26). The tenth they give to the priests is to be the best tenth of that which has been tithed to them. They are to be satisfied with the ‘leftovers’ (verses 31, 32). The principle followed, when the Levites give the best to the priests, is that what is given to them is given to God – and He deserves the best. Our support of the Lord’s work today is also our gift to God – and He should not be given the leftovers! The other side of the picture is that those in the Lord’s work who receive such gifts should recognize they are being entrusted with that which has been given to the Lord. They should be used honestly, carefully, wisely and, above all, prayerfully (2 Cor. 8:20, 21).

These instructions seem to have resolved the conflict between the priests and the Levites for, though the leadership of Moses was attacked again in chapter twenty-one, no further division between priest and Levite is recorded in Numbers.

The Red Heifer (Numbers chapter nineteen)

It is significant that there is no mention of the Red Heifer in either Exodus or Leviticus, and that it appears here only after Israel has been sentenced to thirty-eight more years in the wilderness. It was apparently a provision specifically for those long years now ahead of them. The particular uncleanness emphasized in this chapter is brought about by some contact with death. “He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. ... Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days” (19:11, 16). The uncleanness will be considered serious. “Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. *That person shall be cut off from Israel*” (19:13).

They will have many such contacts in the next 38 years, for at least 603,548 men will die – to say nothing of the women and children who may die natural deaths, and enemies slain in battle (Num. 31:19). The instruction given earlier for the one who

became unclean was to bring a lamb or a goat as a sin offering (Lev. 5:6). With a rock-bottom average of 44 deaths a day (just from the doomed 603,548 men) for the next 38 years it would be quite literally impossible for them to be cleansed if an offering had to be made for each one. Making one offering effective for all future cleansings solved this problem.

However the typology of the passage is what demands our closest attention. Like all of the Old Testament offerings, the heifer pictures Christ in His death. An old hymn says it well.

“Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain,
 Could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away one stain.
 But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, took all our guilt away,
 A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.”²

Several aspects of the Red Heifer offering, as they foreshadow Calvary, deserve our special attention.

First of all, this is the only sacrificial offering that is not set out in the book of Leviticus. As a matter of fact I find no further specific reference to it until it finds its place in the book of Hebrews. Just as it was a special provision for the recently extended time on the wilderness trail in Numbers, it typifies Christ as a provision for us in our walk today. We will enlarge on this facet of it later.

Secondly, as noted in our study of chapter nine, it is a once-for-all sacrifice. The Passover was also a once-for-all sacrifice. This is not generally recognized, for the Israelites offered up Passover lambs every year. However, strictly speaking, there was but one true Passover. In the years following they recalled it by a Passover *celebration* in which lambs were offered. But only once in their history were their firstborn in danger of death. Only once did God pass over their homes while visiting death on their heathen neighbors. After the Passover in Egypt they were, nationally, a redeemed people – and they recalled this fact, and the sacrifice bringing it about, each year. The Passover typifies Christ’s one offering as regards redemption from the guilt of sin, while the Heifer speaks of His one offering for cleansing from the defilement of sin.

There was only one Red Heifer *as far as the Scriptures record*. Evidently, in practice, they eventually ran out of ashes and offered another one. Scripture is silent here. Today there is a concerted effort among fundamentalist Jewish leaders to find just the right heifer to offer so this source of cleansing may be reinstated when they again have their temple. They should be looking for the fulfillment of the type, not a duplication of it – for Christ is the only source of cleansing God has for them today.

The once for all character of Christ’s death is emphasized in the context where the offering of the Red Heifer is mentioned in Hebrews. “With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place *once for all*, having obtained *eternal* redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the *ashes of a heifer*, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for

² “The Believers Hymn Book” – Pickering and Inglis, hymn number 170 on page 150.

the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:12 – 14). “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. ... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:10, 14).

Another aspect of Calvary emphasized in the Red Heifer offering is the fact that His death was to be at the hands of an unbelieving Israel and their wickedly murderous leaders. This is why, even though the heifer was to be perfect, the place where it was offered was to be a clean place, and the very purpose of it was for cleansing -- everyone who had anything to do with it became *unclean* until the evening. Peter echoed this emphasis when he addressed those who had crucified Christ. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, *you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death*” (Acts 2:22, 23).

Now let us consider the passage with these items in mind.

“This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come’” (Num. 19:2).

Scripture teaches that only a man can take the place of a man, as his substitute. This appears to be one of the lessons taught by the sacrifice of Isaac. While God instructed Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, it was never His intention that He would allow him to go through with it. In Micah 6:7 the question, “Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” implies a strong negative answer from God. Three times in Jeremiah God tells His people that it had never entered His mind that they should give their children as sacrifices, as did the worshippers of Baal (Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

Why, then, did God ask Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering? He had a dual message to typify. First of all He made it clear, as noted above, that animal offerings were not the final answer to sin. No animal could be an adequate substitute for a man. The sin of man could only be paid for by the death of a *man*. Then, when He did not allow Abraham to go through with the sacrifice, He revealed that not just any man would do. Not even the miracle-born son of Abraham, the great man of faith, would do! Only God’s Son is qualified to be that man.³

The man chosen to be the sacrifice must have a life of infinite value or it would suffice for only one sinner. He must also be without sin of his own, otherwise his death

³ What a difference exists between the heart of God and the heart of man! When Abraham’s hand was raised to take the life of Isaac, God stopped him. But when, centuries later, it was God’s Son whose life was at stake, men cried out, in effect, “Go ahead, kill Him, crucify Him.”

would only care for his own sins. Christ is the only one who meets these requirements. Being God, His life has the infinite value required, and He was totally without sin.

The heifer was to be without blemish. This refers, of course, to the sinlessness of Christ. That He was sinless is crystal clear in Scripture. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). Only He could ask, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46) without fear of facing condemnation. At His trial and crucifixion even his enemies bore testimony to His innocence. Pilate’s wife told him, “Have nothing to do with that just Man” (Matt. 27:19). The centurion in charge of the crucifixion, and those under him who carried it out, when they saw what happened at His death, became terrified. They cried out, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54). The centurion added “This Man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:41). Judas, in his remorse, confessed to the chief priests and elders, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4). Neither Herod nor Pilate, the judge in the ‘trial,’ could find fault with Him. Pilate confessed, “I have found no fault in his Man ... neither did Herod ... indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him” (Luke 23:14, 15). Yet, as typified in Numbers nineteen, they took Him outside the city (the “camp”) and murdered Him.

Not only was the heifer to be without blemish, but one “on which a yoke has never been placed” (Num. 19:2 – NASB). This was not to be a work animal. Clearly, the lesson to be learned is that it was not the work of Christ – the three years of matchless ministry previous to Calvary – but His death that would cleanse away sin. Some today laud Christ as the master teacher, the compassionate healer, and the perfect example - all of which He certainly was - but apart from His sacrificial death He could not be the *Savior!*

The heifer was to be taken outside the camp to be “slaughtered.” To fully appreciate the significance of the heifer being slain “outside the camp” we need to ponder two issues: where the sacrifice should normally have taken place, and why it was not accomplished there.

Surely, in the New Testament, if Israel had really believed John the Baptist, and had welcomed Jesus as the Messiah instead of rejecting Him, His death would still be necessary. Otherwise their faith could not have saved them. Their salvation, and ours, would have been rendered impossible by deleting the death of the only one qualified to be the substitute for sinful men. But where, and how, would He have died?

Other offerings were made at the brazen altar, located at the entrance of the tabernacle, in the very heart and center of the camp.⁴ The Lord had warned Moses, “Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from among his people” (Lev.

⁴ The carcass of the sin offering was burned outside the camp (Lev. 4:12) but it was slain at the brazen altar, where only the fat and some selected organs were burnt (Lev. 4:8 – 10).

17:8, 9). If it were not for the unbelief and rejection of Israel Christ surely would have gone, voluntarily, to that altar and there, with believing Israel looking on through tear dimmed eyes, submitted to death. That death could have been at the hand of God personally (as Isaac's would have been by the hand of his father if God had not intervened). Or it could have been brought about through the instrumentality of the High Priest as God's representative (as was the case with the other offerings). Then, after three days, He would have appeared again, in resurrection, before his nation and sent them out with the glorious news of redemption. Israel would then have become what God had intended from the beginning, and what they will even yet be in a future day, His witnesses. "‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He’" (Isa. 43:12).

But was not Israel's rejection of Him, and His shameful death on a cross, clearly foretold? Yes, of course, in both prophecy and type. But the *murder* of Christ did not occur because it was prophesied. It was prophesied because God foresaw it would occur. Prophecy does not determine events – God's foreknowledge of events determines prophecy. To think that prophecy *determines* coming events denies any real *foreknowledge* on God's part. God does not "foreknow" what will happen only because He knows *He will cause it to happen*. No matter how it is dressed up with theological jargon, this would make God the author of sin!

So the Red Heifer being offered outside the camp indicated that God knew Israel would reject His Son and take His death into their own hands. Peter makes this clear in Acts 2:23. "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God [God's part], you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death [man's part]." No wonder the very priest in charge of this ceremony became unclean!

"You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence. Next Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times" (Num. 19:3, 4 - NASB).

Notice the priest was not the one to slay the heifer, but it was to be slain in his presence ("before him" – NKJV). This was not the procedure followed in other sacrifices. Who did kill the animal? It does not tell us, but in the fulfillment of the type Christ was not crucified by the priest, but by the Romans. However, it was done before the priest – with his full knowledge and at his active instigation. This principle is illustrated later in Israel's history. David did not so much as touch Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, but Nathan told him, "You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword ... of the people of Ammon" (2 Sam. 12:9). Likewise the leaders of Israel did not nail Christ to the cross, but they are held guilty of His murder (Acts 7:52).

The priest then took some of the blood with his finger and sprinkled it seven times toward the front of the tabernacle, where the brazen altar was located. Symbolically he was saying, "That is where it *should* have been done! That is where it *should* have been done! That is where --- !" In fulfillment of this typology Christ did not

die gloriously in the heart of Jerusalem, He was murdered in shame and rejection outside the gate.

This may have been at least a part of the “cup” Christ was praying about in Gethsemane. “In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:7, 8). He had come for the very purpose of dying for sinful men, but must He submit to being *murdered* by them? Degrading though this would be, in His perfect humanity “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, *even the death of the cross*” (Phil. 2:8). He prayed, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” What submission to the Father’s will, what wonderful grace, what love for us, what concern for the very ones who crucified Him was demonstrated when He uttered those simple words!

It is this very self-humbling Paul had in mind when he said, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). When He had every right to expect those for whom He was suffering to appreciate it and give Him honor, they were screaming their hatred and contempt. While they were spitting at Him, cursing Him and pouring out abuse against Him He was loving them, suffering for them and praying for them. There may be times when we, too, will be humiliated, abused and derided by those we are seeking to reach for Christ. May we be enabled, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, to have the mind of Christ at such a time.

“Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer” (Num. 19:5, 6).

The priest himself did not burn the animal but, as in the taking of its life, it was done in his presence and at his instigation. So as Christ was dying on the cross, pouring out His matchless life to the last heartbeat, the Jewish leaders were there watching Him die. They were not physically killing Him, but they were responsible for His death and were smug in their satisfaction that they had rid themselves of this challenge to their power and authority.

The heifer was burned up totally. There was nothing left but ashes. Many of the offerings specified by the law provided for the needs of the priests. When they ate the meat of an animal that had been sacrificed, it typified the believer feasting on Christ. When they were given the skin, it pictured the believer dressed in the righteousness of Christ, as Adam was clothed with coats of skins. But in this offering there was nothing to meet the priests’ physical needs. When the day was done only the ashes were left. Even these were not for them because they were priests, but only because they were in need of cleansing. The cleansing was available even for the priest who had superintended this sacrifice. So the salvation purchased at Calvary was available even for those who had crucified Him - if they had only availed themselves of it. What wonderful grace!

The priest was to take cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet material and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer (v. 6). These same items were associated with the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:4). Since leprosy is a clear type of sin, does this not at least hint at the truth voiced by Paul, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor. 5:21)?

“The one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening” (Num. 19:8).

This offering was for cleansing, yet everyone who had anything to do with it became unclean. Not only the priest who was “in charge” became unclean, so did the one who burned the animal. Since this aspect of it reflects the part the Romans had at the crucifixion it indicates they also bore responsibility for the death of Christ. Those who are so vocal in laying responsibility for the death of Christ at the door of the Jews need to remember the entire story.

The soldiers, who put a crown of thorns on His head, placed a purple robe on Him and bowed before Him in derision of His claim to be a king, were Gentiles. Those who spat on Him and beat Him on the head and about the face (Matt. 27:31; John 19:2, 3), were Gentiles. Those who nailed Him to the cross, gambled for His clothing while they watched Him die (John 19:23, 24) and then thrust a spear into His side before they took Him down from that cross, were Gentiles! The very judge who had Christ flogged to within an inch of His life and, knowing Him to be innocent, sent Him to His death (Matt. 27:26), was a Gentile. It was not the Jews alone, nor only the Gentiles, who crucified Christ. All mankind must bear the blame. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10). It was for sinful mankind He laid down His life and it is to sinful mankind that He offers His salvation.

We, too, share the blame for the death of Christ, since it was our sins that made it necessary. Our initial unbelief was as ugly in God’s sight as that of the Pharisees and Saducees. Yet God loved all of us ⁵ and gave His Son over to the shame and agony of Calvary that we might be forever cleansed from sin and might share His matchless life.

“Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin” (Num. 19:9).

Since the ashes were used for cleansing, it was necessary for anyone who was unclean to go outside the camp to obtain it. This indicates that the camp itself was not clean. The tabernacle, with its priests, its offerings and its rituals, was still located in the

⁵ John 3:16 does not teach that God had an emotional attachment to the world, but that He longed for those in it to be saved. The word here is not *phileo*, but *agapao*. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 1:4). He made it possible by giving His Son. If they do not obtain everlasting life it will be because they did not believe.

camp – but cleansing was in a *clean* place, outside. The writer of Hebrews called upon the Jews of his day to forget the temple, and its priests - who were arrayed against God by their rejection of the Savior - and go outside the gate (of the city – the “camp” of that day) for cleansing. “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.⁶ Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:10 – 13).

The Ethiopian Eunuch illustrates this. He was just returning from Jerusalem, where he had gone as a proselyte to worship at the temple. It was not there, however, but far “outside the gate” that he found the Savior (Acts 8:25 – 39). Also Saul of Tarsus, who had all the access to the temple available to a non-Levite, found his cleansing far “outside the gate” on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1 – 6). Today, tragically, many are in a position where they must go outside of their particular church, and often bear reproach for it, to hear the gospel. Any “camp” where Christ is in rejection must be forsaken. We, too, must “go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Christ should have been allowed to lay down His matchless life in the heart of Jerusalem, the “city of God.” Instead He was taken outside the camp of Israel to die. This was a shame to Israel, and they are *blamed* for the cross. But when He was taken outside the camp of Judaism He was brought out where we Gentiles were. This is one reason we *glory* in the cross!

“And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave” (Num. 19:17, 18).

While the sacrifice of the heifer was a once for all event, its value was made available to the unclean for years to come. When one became polluted by sin he did not have to offer a heifer, he was just sprinkled with water that had been run through the ashes of the one already offered.

The water symbolizes the word of God (Eph. 5:26) in the hands of the Spirit of God. There is a very close association between the word of God and the Spirit of God. This is illustrated by the way Abraham obtained a bride for Isaac (Gen. 22). He, typical in the story of God the Father, sent the servant, typical of the Holy Spirit, to obtain a bride for Isaac, a type of Christ. When the servant found Rebecca she was by the well of water. That fact is emphasized in the text. The well and the water found there are mentioned at least eight times. That is where the Holy Spirit found me – by the well of water!

⁶ “The bodies of the sin-offering beasts were burned outside the camp, not because they were unfit for a holy camp but, rather, because an unholy camp was an unfit place for a holy sin-offering.” -- The Revised Scofield Bible, note on Lev. 4:12.

However a man may have full access to the word of God, and even hear it taught faithfully and preached powerfully, and still be lost forever. He may even experience conviction for sin and still not be saved. What is lacking? He must *believe* the record of what Christ has done for him – he must have *faith in Christ* (Eph. 2:8, 9).

The faith is symbolized in Numbers nineteen by the hyssop mentioned in verse eighteen. “A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.” Earlier in Israel’s history hyssop was used to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts in Egypt (Ex. 12:22). There it spoke of how the death of the lamb was of no value to the firstborn unless it was applied to his house. So all that Christ did on Calvary is of no value to the sinner until it is applied to his heart by faith. He must not think of Christ only as one who died on a cross, but as the One who died *for him* on a cross, the One who took **his** place and paid **his** debt of sin. So, too, as typified in the story of the Red Heifer, the hyssop of faith is needed to apply the cleansing water of the word to his life. But how does faith come? “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). Where does the Spirit come into the picture? He inspired the word and He is the one who brings conviction to the heart of the one hearing it.

The water that was added to the vessel containing the ashes was to be “running water,” literally, “*living* water.” What a remarkable symbol for the word of God! In a chapter full of references to death it is *living* water that is used for cleansing! So eternal life comes to the sinner as the Spirit of God brings the word of Christ’s death and resurrection to his heart with convicting and converting power.

Cleansing for the saint comes through the same instrumentality. When the believer sins, Christ does not have to die again. When he admits his sin to himself and to God (1 Cor. 11:31) the merits of the once for all sacrifice are applied through the living water, the word of that death (Heb. 9:13, 14), and he is cleansed (1 John 1:9). There is no need for the continuing and repeated death of Christ that is said to take place in the Roman Catholic “mass.” Nor is there any need for the wayward saint to be saved all over again. The one sacrifice is sufficient!⁷

“He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. 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” (Num. 19:11, 12 – KJV).

As noted before, this chapter focuses on those who were present and consenting to Christ’s crucifixion. Everyone who had anything to do with this sacrifice became

⁷ When David sinned with Bathsheba he did not lose his salvation. It was the joy of that salvation he cried out for. With this chapter in Numbers no doubt in mind, he prayed, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psa. 51:7, 12).

unclean, even though its express purpose was cleansing. Anyone who touched the corpse of a dead person became unclean for seven days. He was to be cleansed on the third day and the seventh day. If he missed the third day cleansing the seventh day cleansing was not available to him, and he would be cut off from his people.

Christ was raised from the dead on the *third* day, and the number *seven* is the number of completeness and perfection. Those who were present and consenting to the death of Christ, by that very presence and consent, “touched” the dead body of Christ and became unclean. After three days Christ rose from the dead and they were given the opportunity to repent, believe on Him and be cleansed from their sin. “You denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses ... Repent ... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:14, 15, 19).

Those who availed themselves of that “third day cleansing” will be raised from the dead at the close of the Tribulation when Israel’s program will reach “seventh day” completeness and perfection (Rev. 11:18). Then they will receive the second cleansing and be a part of the “all Israel” that Paul says will be saved then (Rom. 11:26). This seventh day cleansing is described in Ezekiel. “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will *sprinkle clean water* on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:24 – 28).

This seems to be what Peter had in mind in his first epistle when he wrote to the Jewish believers of his day. “[You] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed *in the last time*. ... Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 1:5, 13).

Those who crucified Christ, but rejected God’s gracious offer of cleansing after His resurrection, will not be present when all Israel will be saved. Their generation met severe physical judgment just a few years later, at the hands of the Romans, and the unbelievers among them will be eternally cut off from their people. There will be no “seventh day cleansing” for them. They missed the “third day cleansing.”

There is a principle here that demands attention. Just as there will be no second chance for those Israelites missing the third day cleansing, there will be no second chance for any today who leave this life without having placed their faith in the risen Christ. We, as believers, will experience a “seventh day cleansing” when the Lord calls us home and we are finally free from the old nature and all it represents. Then we shall be presented before Him “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... [we will be] holy and without blemish” (Eph. 4:27). We, too, are “kept by the power of God through

faith,” for “He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). However we are not awaiting the last times of Israel’s program. We “eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20, 21). This “seventh day” culmination of our salvation will take place at the Rapture.

One last message from this remarkable chapter deserves our notice. The uncleanness depicted all through it is “catching.” When anyone died in a tent, everyone in the tent, everyone who came into it later, and even any vessel in it without a cover, became unclean (Num. 19:14, 15). Sin is depicted here as virulent in its spreading of contamination. Even one who touched something that had been touched by an unclean person became unclean! (Num. 19:22). Uncleanness is “catching!” It is both contagious and infectious. Jude warns of this in verses 22 and 23 of his letter. “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

It is at least partly for this reason that we are warned against close relationships with believers who are still enslaved by sin. Paul warned the Corinthians, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). He then went on to say, “I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11). We must have love and compassion for the erring brother, but we must also beware of “catching” his spiritual ailment! May we so live before those around us that our *faith* will be catching!

How different was Christ! His *righteousness* was “catching!” He touched the leper but did not become unclean. Instead the leper became clean. He came into the presence of a corpse, the daughter of Jairus, and took her by the hand (Mark 5:41), but He did not become unclean. Instead He brought the girl to life. He sat by a well and talked with an immoral woman, and her life was transformed. Our closest relationship must be with Him whose very fellowship brings cleansing and godliness.

NEARING THE END OF THE JOURNEY

(Numbers chapters twenty and twenty-one)

The Years of Wandering

It is important to realize that nearly thirty-eight years come and go between chapter nineteen and chapter twenty of Numbers. In Numbers 20:1 we are told that Miriam's death took place "in the first month." It is silent as to which year this happened. However we are told that her brother, Aaron, whose death is recorded later in this same chapter, occurred "in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt on the first day in the fifth month" (Num. 33:38). Commenting on Numbers 20:1, one commentary states, "It [the date of Miriam's death] appears to have been the first month of the fortieth, and last, year of wandering."¹

The greater part of the thirty-eight years is passed over without comment. They were merely marking time, wandering in the wilderness. What was life like for them? It must have been just a cheerless 'merry-go-round,' going around and around but getting nowhere.

We have noted earlier how gracious God was to His erring people, meeting their needs faithfully until the rebellious generation had died. However His very provisions were, no doubt, often a source of vexation to them. Their clothing did not wear out. Great! But can you imagine a woman wearing the same dress for thirty-eight years? Their feet did not swell. Wonderful! But they had no rest for their feet as they tramped over the desert. They had grumbled about having only manna to eat - at a time when they expected to be in the land, and eating the good corn of the land (Josh. 5:11, 12), within but a few days. They had complained, "Now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna" (Num. 11:6). Then, because of their rebellion, they had to look at "this manna" for thirty-eight more years!

Many of the things they were told to do when they came into the land would be very difficult, or impossible, to accomplish for the next thirty-eight years. God, of course, foreknew the years of delay that would be occasioned by their rebellion, but the instructions given them before it took place did not anticipate them. At least eight times, before Kadesh-barnea, such instructions were prefixed by "When you come into the land."

It must have been impossible to keep the feast of unleavened bread with only manna available. Surely they would have difficulty obtaining the flour, oil and wine to accomplish the offering described in Num. 15:2 - 7. By the time this instruction was given they were committed to long years of desert life, so they were specifically told to do this *when they came into the land*.

¹ The Pulpit Commentary, volume 2, page 252 of the commentary on Numbers

The instructions concerning houses (Lev. 14:34 & following), trees (Lev. 19:23 – 25), harvests (Lev. 23:10), giving the land a Sabbath rest (Lev. 25:2) and so on could not be followed in the desert. The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34 – 43) would be meaningless to them. During this feast they were to construct “booths” (the same Hebrew word translated “tabernacles” in this passage) and live in them for seven days to remind them of how they *had* dwelt in booths (tents or other temporary structures) in the wilderness (Lev. 23:42, 43). But they were still in the wilderness. They were already dwelling in booths. Even if they tried to keep this feast during their wanderings they would despair of finding, in the desert, “the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook” (Lev. 23:40) to build their booths.

As we have seen, many details of life prescribed in the Law at Sinai could not be executed in the desert, and were put off for 38 years by their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. Similarly, many of the prospects presented to Israel in the Gospels and early Acts were rendered impossible, until this age of Grace is past, by the action of their leaders recorded in Acts seven:

-- They had been assured that their sacrifices on behalf of the kingdom would be more than repaid when the kingdom was established (Mark 10:28 - 30). The kingdom was a treasure (Matt. 13:44), and a pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45, 46) - worth selling all they had to possess. With the kingdom postponed, however, they found themselves poor. The fall, at Acts seven - that had bereft them of that kingdom, had become “riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles,” therefore God used Gentile believers to supply their needs. When Paul took up offerings for the poor saints in Jerusalem he acknowledged the Gentiles debt to Israel and said, “*If the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things*” (Rom. 15:25 - 27).

-- The lifestyle promised in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25 – 34), and so on, became impractical when the kingdom was postponed (1 Tim. 5:8). Promises of full supply of their needs depended on their going into the kingdom (Matt. 6:33).

-- Promises of automatic and full answers to prayer presuppose millennial conditions (Isa. 65:24, 25).

-- The possibility of John the Apostle still being alive at the return of Christ (John 21:21 - 23) would require entry into the Millennium during his lifetime. Since he lived longer than any of the other disciples, he could have lived to see Christ's return if this had not been made impossible by the decision of Israel in Acts seven -- and the subsequent postponement of the kingdom to inaugurate this age of Grace.

Some things they should have done they evidently failed to do. They did not circumcise their children (Josh. 5:5). They also did not make use of the tabernacle as they should have (Acts 7:42, 43).

One outstanding purpose of sending Israel into Canaan at this time had been to destroy the wicked inhabitants of the land, whose cup of iniquity was full at last. But the army of over 600,000 men “able to go forth to war” never were able to lift a finger toward accomplishing this. It had not been for this thirty-eight years of empty, boring,

and useless thirty-eight years that God had laid hold of them and brought them out of Egypt. He had a glorious, victorious and productive future planned for them. Tragically, they did not lay hold of God's plan, and were not allowed to experience that future. The victorious march into the land of milk and honey was reserved for another army – the new generation registered in the second census.

When God 'laid hold' of me He had a life and ministry planned for me. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Because, too often, I have failed to walk in the Spirit and to walk by faith, I am sure I have not fully 'laid hold' of that plan.

Paul expressed this concern, even about himself, in Philippians. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may *lay hold* of that for which Christ Jesus has also *laid hold* of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12 – 14). I wonder how much of my life will be passed over, like the years of Israel's wandering, without comment when the crowns are bestowed. I am confident that, by God's grace, I have "kept the faith," but fear I have failed to fully "fight the good fight" and finish the course He had laid out for me (2 Tim. 4:7).

Now the end of their prolonged journey approaches. Behind them are the many evidences of God's power, His love, His patience and His grace. They have also seen His glorious holiness displayed in judgments and chastenings. After nearly forty years of delays the nation stands at the very door of the Promised Land, with the assurance they will soon have arrived 'home' at long last!

This last year is taken up with preparations for the glad day when they will cross the Jordan and eat the good corn of the land. Their blessed hope – so long deferred – illuminates their horizon, even as our "Blessed Hope," so long delayed, should fill our hearts with joyous expectation today. Maranatha!

Miriam's Death (Numbers 20:1)

It seems strange that only part of one verse is given to record the death and burial of Miriam. As a girl she had played an important role in saving the life of Moses. She grew up to become a prophetess, and led the women in their song of praise for deliverance from the Egyptian army (Ex. 15:20, 21). She, along with her brothers, was sent before Israel when they left Egypt (Micah 6:4). The entire congregation had halted their march to Palestine for seven days to await her cleansing from leprosy (Num. 12:15). But it appears from this verse that they didn't even pause to mourn her passing, as they did for Aaron and Moses later. This slight may be a further rebuke for having taken it upon herself to reprimand Moses. She had demanded equality with him, but here she is almost totally ignored. I wonder how many who think themselves great leaders here will

be on the back row at the Bema when the crowns are given out?

A vivid illustration of the difference between the apparent value of a man during his days of activity, and his actual worth, is found in Second Samuel twenty-three. As David looked back over his life he listed and commended his “mighty men” who had stood by him in his battles. Joab had been the captain of his army all those years. Amazingly his name is found only incidentally in David’s list. In spite of all of his prominence before men, David did not see Joab as one his “mighty men.” His two brothers and his armor bearers are listed (2 Samuel 23:18, 24, 37), but not Joab! “Not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends,” Paul reminds us (2 Cor. 10:18).

Water from the Rock (Numbers 20:2 – 13)

In Exodus, chapter seventeen, God had miraculously provided them with water out of the rock. He had continued to meet their need for water in various ways for many years, as we have seen. But now they are thirsty again. This supply of physical water was a practical necessity. The way God provided it on this occasion demonstrates their total dependence on Him, and His gracious care for them, even while they are enduring chastening for their sin. However it is the rich and extensive typology of the passage that will occupy our attention.

The Water

In some passages, such as John 3:5, water is typical of the word of God, but it has other symbolic significance as well. In John chapter seven, the water speaks of the Holy Spirit. “‘He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:38, 39). Isaiah speaks of this also. Using water as a symbol for the Holy Spirit, he promises it will not only produce life, but will bring blessing and healthy growth “like willows by the watercourses” (Isa. 44:3, 4). He paints a lovely picture of those who walk in the Spirit. “The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (Isa. 58:11). He extends God’s invitation to the thirsty. “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1).

In regard to water for Israel in the wilderness two passages stand out. In Exodus 17:1 – 7 the giving of the Spirit at conversion is typified.² In this chapter in Numbers the typology portrays the believer who is no longer enjoying the life-enriching ministry of

² The Old Testament believer was not given the Spirit at conversion, but the typology looks on to the New Covenant, which makes this provision in the day when all Israel will be saved (Ezek. 36:26, 27 & context). Although it is not prophesied for *us*, God graciously does give each believer today the Holy Spirit at conversion (Rom. 8:9).

the Spirit, because of unconfessed sin in his life. It denotes those who, like David in Psalm 51, have lost the joy of God’s salvation. How very thirsty one can become in such a situation!

The Rock

The “rock” is typical of Christ. It is most important to see this clearly. The largest segment of Christendom is suffering from a failure to recognize it. The Roman Catholic Church makes much of Matthew 16:18. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” They make three serious errors in interpreting this verse.

They understand the “church” in this verse to be the church of this age. It is, instead, the kingdom church mentioned in Psalm 22:25. There Christ is portrayed as praising God in the midst of the great assembly (“ekklesia” in the Septuagint) after He has been brought to the dust of death (Psa. 22:15). Psalm 22:25 is quoted in the book of Hebrews. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the *church* [ekklesia] will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:12 – KJV). This seems to be a reference to His post-resurrection ministry. The “great assembly” (NKJV) could describe the time, before His ascension, when He appeared to “over five hundred brethren at once” (1 Cor. 15:6).

Also Roman Catholic theology eulogizes Peter as the chief of the apostles in the present day church. Peter did have a place of leadership in the kingdom church, but it is Paul who is the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16). It is to Paul that this age of grace was entrusted (Eph. 3:2, 3). It is to Paul we must look for the truths peculiar to the church that is Christ’s Body (2 Tim. 2:1, 2; 1 Cor. 14:37). Paul did not instruct us to be followers of Peter. He said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

In the third place, because “Peter” means “a rock,”³ they dogmatically declare that the rock is a symbol of Peter, and teach that the church will be built on him. The Pope derives his authority from this consideration. Actually, the rock is symbolic of Christ Himself, as other Scripture makes crystal clear. They make three mistakes in one verse – and then build their theology and practice upon it!

Does the rock in Matthew 16:18 really represent Christ? It is a fruitful study to follow the word “rock” through both the Old and New Testaments to seek its significance.

The word “rock” is used symbolically at least forty-six times in the Old Testament. Over and over it is clearly typical, or symbolic, of God. In the Song of

³ “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word for “Peter” is “petros” and the rock upon which Christ will build His church is “petra.” According to Strong’s Concordance “petros” is “a (piece of) rock,” while “petra” means “a (mass of) rock.”

Moses he refers repeatedly to God as the Rock. He opens his song by declaring, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect” (Deut. 32:4). As we learn from him, more than water is brought forth from the Rock. There is honey and oil out of the Rock (Deut. 32:13), denoting sweetness and the “oil of gladness” (Heb. 1:9). He speaks of the Rock of his salvation (Deut. 32:15) and reminds Israel that God is “The Rock who begot you... the God who fathered you” (Deut. 32:18). He warns them that their Rock will sell them into bondage if they go their own way (Deut. 32:30). In Judges 6:21 fire came out of the Rock to consume the offering of Gideon. In the Psalms also God is frequently referred to as the Rock.

As to the rock in Numbers we are not left in doubt. “That Rock was Christ” is the declaration of Paul (1 Cor. 10:4). Concerning a rock as a foundation, Paul states, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

Knowing his Old Testament, as surely he did, Peter would have considered it blasphemous to consider himself as a “rock,” and would have recoiled in horror from the thought. After all, David had said, “Who is God, except the LORD? And *who is a rock, except our God?*” (Psa. 18:31).

(Strike the Rock [Exodus 17:1 – 7])

In order to fully understand and appreciate the typical significance of Numbers 20:8 – 13 we must review a former, somewhat similar, incident in their history. It is recorded in Exodus 17:1 – 6.

1 Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.

2 Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, “Give us water, that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?”

3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!”

5 And the LORD said to Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go.

6 “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

This passage records the initial provision of water out of the rock. Israel at that time was, nationally, a redeemed people. Their sins have been recognized, judged worthy of death, and put away by the death of the substitute – the Passover lamb. This

lamb typifies Christ, of course. “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). They have experienced redemption by blood, satisfying God’s holiness. They have also experienced redemption by power, for the Red Sea crossing has delivered them from Pharaoh, a type of Satan.

We need to understand the relationship between these two aspects of redemption. I recall an evangelist who pictured our redemption in a very moving way. His illustration went something like this.

“Satan had us tightly caged up as his prisoners. Christ longed to set us free, so He offered Satan the cattle on a thousand hills, and the gold in all the mines, as a ransom. When Satan refused His offer He asked him, ‘What is the price you want?’ Satan answered, ‘I want your life’s blood!’ Christ agreed and went to the cross to set us free.”

The story is rich in emotional appeal, but it does not have scriptural support. The blood of Christ was shed to meet our obligation to the holiness of God, not to satisfy the demands of Satan. Satan was not “bought off” – he was “destroyed.” “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might *destroy* [‘render powerless’ – NASB] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). So in Exodus seventeen the congregation, as a nation, are a redeemed people.⁴ They have been redeemed, both by blood and by the mighty power of God exercised at the Red Sea. But they are thirsty! The story of Calvary is typified again. The smiting of the rock looks at the cross, as the Passover did, but with a new emphasis. In the Passover it was deliverance from death and bondage. Here Calvary is typified as being the basis for the giving of the Spirit to satisfy their thirsty souls.

Today, when we have put our trust in Christ, we are forever redeemed individuals. Unlike the Israelites in Numbers, we have already received the Spirit and are in no danger of having Him leave us. But we thirst for the godliness of life and blessing of fellowship with God that only the ministry of the Holy Spirit can produce. This ministry of the Spirit, sadly, can be curtailed when we grieve Him (Eph. 4:30), and all but discontinued when we quench Him (1 Thess. 5:19). How thirsty we then become!

While the multitude assembled around the rock did not receive the Holy Spirit, what happened was typical of that which would one day be available to Israel. When the Passover had been fulfilled by Christ at Calvary and the descent into, and safe passage through, the Red Sea (a place of death) had been fulfilled in His resurrection, the disciples received the Holy Spirit (John 7:38, 39 with John 20:21, 22).

As the story unfolds we see the grumbling congregation, who deserve judgment, gathered around the rock. The rock, on the other hand, picturing Christ, deserves none of God’s wrath. In the hand of Moses is the “rod of God” with which he had brought judgment after judgment on the Egyptians. He lifts the rod to strike – but it is the rock

⁴ This does not mean that each individual was saved, but that the nation, as a nation, is on redemption ground.

that receives the blow, not the guilty people! Then the water flows in great abundance, like a river (Psa. 78:15, 16; 105:41).

All of this finds its fulfillment in Christ. It was those gathered around the cross, representative of a lost race of men, who were guilty and deserving the penalty of death. But it was Christ, holy, harmless and undefiled, totally innocent of any crime, who received the stroke of the Father's poured out wrath. "Who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? ... He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering..." (Isa. 53:8 – 10 – NASB).

Then the host of redeemed sinners had water in abundance. It was given on the basis of the smiting of the rock. For us also the gift of the Spirit, and the enjoyment of His ministry in our lives, is based on the death of Christ and can only come to us when we put our full trust in that death for our sin.

Speak to the Rock (Numbers 20:2 - 11)

"Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: 'If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink'" (Num. 20:2 – 5).

This is almost totally the new generation venting their unbelief. They are little different from their fathers. Their complaint is the latest version of the dirge Israel has been intoning for forty years. They show no gratitude for the many years God has met their every need – including their need for water. There is no recognition of blame for their situation. They do not admit that their fathers would still be alive, and they would be drinking milk and feasting on honey, if they had not rebelled against the Lord and against the leadership of Moses. They are no better than their parents' generation, and fail to appreciate that they are much better off! There is no recognition that (since the forty years specified for their sojourn in the wilderness is about up) they will soon be in the land. They are guilty and deserve the judgment of God. Amazingly, judgment does not fall on them.

"Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and

struck the rock twice with his rod; ⁵ and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank” (Num. 20:8 – 11).

While this passage is somewhat similar to that in Exodus seventeen, there are numerous and very significant differences. The background is similar. Here again the guilty and thirsty people are gathered around the rock. Moses stands before them with a rod in his hand, and again waters flow forth like a river. Even though this is not the same place ⁶ or the same rock, the rock is typical of the same Savior.

It is the differences that grip our attention, enlighten our minds and satisfy our hearts. In Exodus seventeen, Moses alone was involved. In Numbers, Aaron was associated with him in seeking water for the people. His presence was not incidental, for God commanded it, and he shared the blame for the disobedience manifested. In Exodus it was the rod of Moses that was used. In Numbers it was the rod of Aaron. Earlier Moses was instructed to strike the rock, and he obeyed. This time he was told to speak to the rock. Instead he spoke to the people and struck the rock – twice! In the first instance Moses was not reprimanded, as both he and Aaron were in the second one.

What was typified in all of this?

Moses symbolized the law in both cases. ⁷ The law required that sin be punished. In Exodus God identified Himself with the rock by standing on it. Thus, in type, the stroke of justice was laid on Him instead of on the guilty congregation. This was an advance over the typology of the Passover. There the *lamb*, typical of Christ of course, was slain. Here the rod of judgment is, more clearly and specifically than in many other types, laid on the Lord Himself. It was only to be struck once, for the death of Christ for sinful men, pictured here, was to be a once for all offering. As the waters gushed forth out of the stricken rock, so the death of Christ in our place makes it possible for Him to give us His Holy Spirit, that His blessed ministry in us may satisfy our thirsty souls.

In Numbers Moses is there again, typical of the truth today that the law has not been “made void,” but “established” (Rom. 3:31). ⁸ The rod of judgment is no longer in his hand, however. This typifies the truth that there is no penal judgment for the believer.

⁵ It was “his” rod only in the sense that it was in his hand.

⁶ The word “Meribah” is used in both passages. However the word means “contention.” It was a name bestowed in Rephidim because of what happened there rather than a name existing before the incident (Ex. 17:7). In other occurrences of the word it can be translated “waters of contention,” referring not to a place, but to an event. See Num. 20:24; 27:14; Deut. 33:8; Psa. 81:7; Psa. 95:8.

⁷ Even though the Law had not yet been given at Exodus seventeen.

⁸ In a context that places law and grace over against one another as contrasting systems of God’s relationship with men, it says that the law IS “made void.” In 2 Cor. 3:11, the expression “done away” (KJV) is the same word rendered “make void” in Rom. 3:31. While the law, as a system, has been set aside today and God is not relating to us on the basis of law, it is nevertheless retained as a historical testimony to man’s utter guilt and God’s complete righteousness in having met its every demand at Calvary.

His penalty has already been paid (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1 – NASB). Moses stands here as a testimony that the resumption of the flow of water is not because the righteousness of God has been ignored, or bypassed, but because it has been fully satisfied.

The rod in the hand of Moses is the rod of Aaron that we read about in Numbers seventeen. In Exodus Moses had been told, “Take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river” (Ex. 17:5). In Numbers the instruction is to take the rod (the same Hebrew word as is used in Num. 17:10) “from before the Lord” (Num. 20:9). The rod of Aaron has very recently been deposited “before the Lord” where, overnight, it was brought to life, bearing ripe almonds (Num. 17:7, 8). It was displayed as evidence that Aaron was God’s choice to be High Priest, and then “put back” where it was, “before the testimony” (Num. 17:9, 10). There is not even a hint in Scripture that the rod of Moses was ever placed there.

This dead rod that came to life pictured the resurrection of Christ. It established Aaron’s place as High Priest. So Christ, in resurrection, became a High Priest after the order of Melchizedec “according to the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Now see the picture in Numbers.

The people, still with guilt staining their lives, have known the blessedness of the water from the rock, but it has ceased to flow and they are thirsty.

At one time in his life, David experienced the thirst typified here. He had known a rich fellowship with God, as is evidenced in his many lovely psalms. But grievous sin came into his life and he lost the joy of his salvation – the waters had ceased to flow. He describes the depth of his thirst in some of the Psalms he has written. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer” (Psa. 32:3, 4 - NASB). “For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones Because of my sin” (Psa. 38:2, 3).

In Numbers twenty the rock is there, but it does not have to be struck again. Moses is there, but he does not have the rod of judgment in his hand, it is the rod of resurrection. Aaron is there also, established firmly as High Priest by the resurrection-rod. Now all that is required is to speak to the rock.

David experienced this also. He spoke to the Rock. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ... Restore to

me the joy of Your salvation...” (Psa. 51: 1 – 3, 7, 10, 12). When the joy of God’s salvation was restored to him, when the water was flowing again, he could expect to have a renewed testimony for the Lord. “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You” (Psa. 51:13).

When our thirst is satisfied the water Christ gives us will be in us (as was promised to the woman at the well) a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14) -- flowing out to others. When our well goes dry, for the sake of others as well as for our own sake, we need to speak to the Rock!

(Sing to it [Numbers 21:16 – 18])

This study would not be complete without reaching into Numbers chapter twenty-one for one more reference to water.

“From there they went to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather the people together, and I will give them water.’ Then Israel sang this song: ‘*Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it; the well the leaders sank, dug by the nation's nobles, by the lawgiver, with their staves.*’” (Num. 21:16 – 18).

The well, as much as the rock of chapter twenty, speaks of Christ. This time the water is not given in response to the angry demands of the people. God graciously and freely offers it to them. This water comes to them when the people are gathered together - not in anger and unbelief, but in expectation - as a result of the labor of Moses and the other leaders. It is not the rod of Moses here, nor even the rod of Aaron, but the staves, the ‘walking sticks,’ of the leaders. There is at least a suggestion here that one source of refreshing for God’s people depends on their gathering themselves together, and results from the efforts of their leaders. It is a dug well, but, when they sing to it, it becomes an artesian well – “*spring up, O well!*”

This completes a lovely trilogy of truth. “Strike the rock” – salvation: “Speak to the rock” – sanctification: “Sing to [the well]” – worship.

Moses and Aaron Reprimanded (Numbers 20:12, 13)

“Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank” (Num. 20:11).

The humble and patient Moses became, understandably, angry with these people he had been enduring for so many years. Paul advises us, “Be angry, and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26) or, as it is paraphrased, “When angry, beware of sinning.” In his anger, Moses sinned. Instead of speaking to the rock, he scolded the people. Accusing them of being rebels, he became a rebel himself. He struck the rock twice, typifying repeated judgment on Christ, and brought chastening on himself. In spite of the failure of Moses and Aaron to obey God, however, God did not deprive the people of the water. The water gushed forth again, like a river. How very gracious God is!

“Moses, provoked to anger, smote the rock instead of speaking to it as the Lord commanded. What happened? The people still were supplied with the water. Thereby we learn a solemn principle. God’s blessing is not necessarily a sign of His approval of a man or a method. It is only a proof of His own faithfulness. God always honors His promise; but the servant will give an answer for his methods, motives and the manner of his service, as to what ‘sort’ it is.”⁹

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’” (Num. 20:12).

How much Moses and Aaron had done to bring Israel out of Egypt, bring them to the very border of the Promised Land, and then guide them through the years of wandering! With this in mind, it surely must have been a shock to Moses and Aaron to be told they will not be allowed to enter the land. Like the generation that rebelled at Kadesh they will die in the wilderness. Why is their punishment so severe? What have they done?

First of all, it seems they should have seen the need of the people before it became a serious problem and taken the matter before the Lord. But perhaps they were “waiting on the Lord,” and the people mistook it for unconcern.

Moses lost his temper and scolded the people instead of speaking to the rock. How often we condemn and scold the people when it would accomplish much more if we spoke to the Rock about the people!

Moses and Aaron disobeyed the Lord. While Moses was the active one of the two, Aaron was his collaborator, for God held them both accountable. Moses took Aaron’s rod from before the Lord *as the Lord had commanded him* (Num. 20:9). So far, so good. But then he departed from the commandment of the Lord. He not only failed to speak to the rock, he struck it – twice! Disobedience is never a trivial thing with God, and its seriousness is magnified when the disobedient one is in a place of responsibility and leadership. One well-known and loved hymn advises every believer to, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

He made the mistake of forgetting who it was that could bring them water. The people were putting the responsibility for the lack of water on Moses. Moses was drawn into playing their game and accepted that responsibility. He answered, “Must *we* [Moses and Aaron] bring water for you out of this rock?”

⁹ J. Boyd Nicholson, cited in the 1992 issue of “Choice Gleanings,” published by Gospel Folio Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

They were a bad testimony before the children of Israel. “But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’” (Num. 20:12 - NASB).

Our testimony before others is very important in God’s eyes! This was driven home to David when Nathan faced him with his guilt. He was forgiven, his thirst was quenched and his testimony was restored, as we have seen. But what he had done had “given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (2 Sam. 12:14), so God chastened him severely for the rest of his life.

When the Psalmist, Asaph, had his heart filled with doubts he, wisely, refrained from voicing them lest he be a stumbling block to others. “If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children” (Psa. 73:15). When his doubts had been resolved he had something to say that was worth saying. “I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works” (Psa. 73:28 – NASB).

Possibly the greatest justification for the harsh discipline of Moses and Aaron is seen when we consider the typology of the occasion. This is not mentioned in Numbers, for they evidently did not know about the typology involved. But God knew, and for the sake of those of us later who would see the lessons pictured here, the type must not be spoiled. When Moses was told to take the rod of Aaron and speak to the rock, it was intended to teach important truth, strongly and clearly, through the typology.

The offering of the Red Heifer demonstrated how the merits of one offering could be applied over a period of many years. This chapter typifies emphatically that there is ultimately to be *only one offering!*

The fact that Christ need die but once is clear all through Scripture, but is specifically and emphatically taught in the book of Hebrews. At least three times it is described as a “once for all” sacrifice. It is put in contrast to the repeated offerings of the sacrificial system under the law. “[Christ] does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did *once for all* when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:27). By striking the rock again and yet again Moses, typically, equated the sacrifice of Christ with that of animals. The great distinction between the never-ending work of the high priest in the temple and the completed work of Christ is blurred when the rock is smitten with the lash of judgment a total of three times.

The repeated sacrifice of animals bore testimony to the fact that they were not a final answer to sin, that their deaths could not pay the price of redemption. The original smiting of the rock had a different story to tell. In that incident God stood on the rock (Ex. 17:6). This identified Him with the rock more clearly than He was identified with any of the animal sacrifices except the Passover lamb. As Paul put it, “That rock was Christ.” To strike the rock was to strike Him! To strike it again was to declare the

insufficiency of His death. To see that the sacrifice of *animals* could not pay the price of sin is reasonable and scriptural. But to imagine that the death of *God's own Son* could not fully pay the price of sin is unreasonable, unscriptural and actually blasphemous.

Philip P. Bliss put it well in his hymn “Once for All!”

Free from the law – O happy condition!
 Jesus hath bled and there is remission;
 Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
 Christ hath redeemed us once for all.

The once for all death of Christ does raise some vital theological problems however. If the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, how could God have forgiven those whose sins were lived out before Christ was even born?

Down through the centuries before Christ, God revealed more and more what He would one day do for sinful man, but it was never made totally clear that He would give the life of His Son as the ultimate sacrifice (1 Pet. 1:10, 11). No one was specifically told to believe that Christ would die and rise again. Not every Old Testament believer received the same revelation from God (Compare Hebrews eleven). However, as men responded in faith to the various messages He did give them, God acted on the basis of what He knew He would one day do, and justified them (Heb. 11:1, 2). The animal sacrifices had their proper and important place of course. They were to typify Christ and cover sin until it could be taken away by Him. They also taught their lessons, both practical and typical, about the righteousness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the necessity for redemption. They pointed ahead to the ultimate and final sacrifice on Calvary.

Another problem surfaces. When Christ died, He died for all the sins that had already been committed (Rom. 3:25). But what about the future sins of those not yet born? The Red Heifer points to the solution of this problem. The Word of God, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, bears testimony to that death, and, in so doing, extends the merits of the sacrifice into the future. God knew in the Old Testament what He would do about sin, and acted on the basis of it as if it were already an accomplished fact. Christ is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). Somewhat similarly, at Calvary He knew of all the sins still to come in the centuries ahead, and on this basis dealt with them as though they were already an accomplished fact. He laid them all – a great repulsive mass of mankind’s sins – on Christ, who died for them.

The realization that all our sins, even those still in our future, were paid for at Calvary makes the Roman Catholic doctrine of the continuing death of Christ in the “mass” not only unnecessary, but blasphemous.

This glorious truth also gives assurance to the true believer that he will not lose his salvation. If any sin can send him to hell after he has been “*justified from all things*”

(Acts 13:39), it would have to be a sin for which Christ did not die. Horatio G. Stafford put it well in his hymn, “It is Well With My Soul.”

My sin – O the bliss of this glorious thought –
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
 Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more:
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

To this might be added a verse from another hymn found in “The Believers Hymn Book” – hymn # 51.

If Thou hast my discharge procured,
 And freely in my place endured
 The whole of wrath divine;
 Payment God will not twice demand,
 First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
 And then again at mine.

Moses not only struck the rock, he failed to speak to it. This, too, stripped a glorious truth from the type.

To know that our salvation is secure through His once for all offering of Himself brings another serious matter to our attention. If the sins of believers are not to result in the death prescribed by the law (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23) how shall they be handled? It is by speaking to the Rock. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Several misconceptions need to be cleared up in regards to this verse. First of all, it does not involve confessing our sins to any man on earth. Nor does it disregard the fact that we have already been forgiven the moment we believed the gospel. Here justification is not in question, it is sanctification that is in view. We are not dragged back into court to face the legal significance of our sin. We have already been there, our sin considered, the death penalty assigned and executed upon our Substitute, and we have been justified. The law has been fully satisfied. We will never face the law in court again (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1 - NASB). It is now a matter of the relationship between our Father and ourselves as His sons.

Confession involves seeing our actions as God sees them. When we do, how can we either say, “We have no sin,” or “we have not sinned” (1 John 1:8, 10). To do so would be to deceive ourselves and make God a liar. Paul is not silent in this matter. “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). The forgiveness that is mentioned in 1 John 1:9 involves being spared from chastening as a son, not being saved from legal guilt before the law. If we just go blissfully on our way, ignoring our sins as believers, we will still be God’s sons, even

“saints.” But we will not be enjoying water from the Rock, and will be inviting the loving, but serious - and sometimes severe - chastening of the Lord.

All of this truth was deleted from the type when Moses struck the rock twice. No wonder God was angry! The very seriousness of His sentence against Moses and Aaron deeply underlines the vital importance of the message the type was supposed to bring to us. For us today sin is surely not ‘good,’ but when worked together with appropriate chastening, gracious understanding, and wise instruction by our Father, it can be made to *result* in good (Rom. 8:28; Heb. 12:10).

Confrontation with the Edomites (Numbers 20:14 – 21)

It appears that Israel remained at Kadesh-barnea as their principle location for almost thirty-eight years. They may have dispersed somewhat during that time, for Numbers 20:1 says, “Then the children of Israel, *the whole congregation*, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month [as though they were being regathered], and the people stayed in Kadesh.”

For reasons to be discussed later they were directed to approach Canaan from the East instead of from the South. The shortest route would take them through Edom, so Moses requested permission to pass through Edom as they made their way to the eastern side of the Jordan.

The Edomites were descendents of Esau. “Esau was the father of the Edomites” (Gen. 36:43). The message sent to the king of Edom was a masterpiece of humility and tact. Moses had over half a million fighting men at his command, but he did not threaten or demand. He humbly approached the king diplomatically, representing Israel as relatives who have gone through many hardships and are now in need of a right to peacefully cross his land. He pointed out that they were being led by an angel of the Lord, and promised they would not cause any problems to him and his people.

When the request was turned down with a threat to meet him in battle, he pleaded with him again, offering additional assurances of their peaceful and friendly intentions. In response the Edomite army was sent to guard their borders against Israel. Moses did not retaliate in force and fight the Edomites. “They went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom” (Judges 11:18).

The Israelites had been told, when they left Egypt, that they could expect to see war. “When Pharaoh ... let the people go ... God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds *when they see war*, and return to Egypt’” (Ex. 13:17). In the census taken earlier the men were described, repeatedly and specifically, as those able to go out to war. They had no reason to fear a defeat, for they must surely have outnumbered the Edomites, and the Edomites were not “giants” in heavily fortified cities. Yet Moses meekly took the people the long way around and left the Edomites no one to fight with. Moses was willing to fight, but not against his relatives.

How greatly we need to learn this lesson. We, too, are told we are engaged in a war. We have the armor, but it is spiritual armor (Eph. 6:13 – 17). We have weapons, but they are not of the flesh (2 Cor. 10:4). We have an enemy, but it is not a “flesh and blood” enemy (Eph. 6:12). We are sure of eventual victory (2 Cor. 2:14; 10:5). However we need to know who the enemy is. Too often we are busy fighting other believers. Paul warns, “If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” (Gal. 5:15).

Against the wrath of Edom Moses refused to answer in kind. The story is told of a young man who approached Dwight L. Moody and asked him if he believed in ‘the manly art of self defense.’ When assured that he most emphatically did, the young man asked, “Do you favor the Sullivan system or the Jeffrey system?” “Oh, I favor the Solomon system” replied Moody. “I never heard of that one. What is his system of self defense?” Mr. Moody smiled and replied, “Read Proverbs fifteen, one. There it says, ‘A soft answer turns away wrath!’”

This confrontation between the nations of Israel and Edom reminds us of an earlier one between the man Israel (Jacob) and his brother, Esau, recorded in Genesis thirty-three. Esau, accompanied by four hundred men, came to meet Jacob upon his return from Paddan-aram. At that time Esau was in a position to destroy him. However, softened by Jacob’s generous gifts, he met him with a show of friendliness and forgiveness. Here in Numbers the situation is reversed, it is Israel that has the capacity to destroy Edom, but they turn away in peace instead.

The later history of Edom makes one wonder whether or not they should have responded to Edom’s threat and destroyed them. They became enemies to Israel during the period of the Kings (1 Kings 11:14; 2 Kings 8:20, 22; 1 Chron. 18:13). When Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar the sons of Edom stood by and cried out in glee, “Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!” (Psa. 137:7). Or, as the residents of the Watts area in Los Angeles shouted as their battle cry when, years ago, they were burning their own Neighborhood, “Burn, baby, burn!” They pursued those being taken captive with the sword, casting off all pity (Amos 1:11). The entire book of Obadiah was written as a prophecy against Edom. He lists their offences in dramatic detail.

“In the day that you stood on the other side; in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem; even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress” (Obadiah 10 – 14).

Paul gives us instructions that are beautifully illustrated by the response of Moses to the Edomites. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to [God’s] wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:18, 19).

Moses made no mistake when he left the punishment of Edom in the hands of the Lord. They are yet to be judged for their undying hatred for Israel. “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever’” (Amos 1:11). “They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever” (Mal. 1:4). “The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; but the house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall kindle them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau,’ for the LORD has spoken” (Obadiah 18).

The Death of Aaron (Numbers 20:24 – 29)

Aaron was not the strong man that Moses was. He had provided a golden calf for Israel to worship when they thought Moses had died on the mountaintop. He joined with Miriam in her rebellion against the authority of Moses, and had at least been consenting to the striking of the rock but a short time before his death. However he was God’s anointed High Priest, and this had been dramatically authenticated when his rod had budded and borne fruit overnight. As God’s High Priest, he was the only one who could maintain Israel’s close ties with Jehovah through the tabernacle worship. Now he is to die.

This is the first time Israel has had to face the fact that they do not have an unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24). Their priest is prevented by death from continuing his ministry (Heb. 7:23). They are not allowed to see him die, however, nor do they witness the transfer of the priestly garments from Aaron to Eleazar. They see Aaron in his High Priestly garments ascending Mount Hor, and then they behold Eleazar returning. It is a different man, but the same garments. There has been a change, but not a break in the priesthood. This detail may have been intended by God to bear a veiled promise of a High Priest to come who will not die, bringing them a totally unchangeable priesthood that Aaron could not provide (Heb. 7:23, 24).

The people honored Aaron by spending thirty days mourning his death (Num. 20:39). What a blessing it is that we do not need to mourn the death of our High Priest! He did, indeed, die, but not as High Priest. He died as the sacrifice. He was not High Priest until the resurrection, for his priesthood is “according to the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). It is this resurrection life of Christ Paul has in view when he writes, “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His [resurrection] life” (Rom. 5:10).

The “cities of refuge” established when Israel arrived in the land are typical of Christ. Those who took refuge there were safe, from any who would take their lives, until the death of the High Priest (Num. 35:25 – 28). I can never leave my “City of Refuge” and my High Priest will never die! Praise the Lord!

Initial Victories over the Canaanites (Numbers 21:1 – 35)

After the death of Aaron God gave them their first victory over the Canaanites (Num. 21:1). The reprieve these wicked people had been enjoying for thirty-eight years, because of the unbelief and rebellion of Israel at Kadesh-barnea, had come to its conclusion. The new generation was to bring about their destruction – a judgment that had been graciously held in abeyance for over four hundred years. The victories over Arad, the Amorites (Num. 21:21 – 26) and Og, king of Bashan (Num. 21:31 – 35), were encouraging tokens of their coming victories in their conquest of the land, under Joshua.

No sooner did they experience the victory over the Canaanite, the king of Arad, however, than they fell back into the ways of their ancestors and began to complain of their situation - and blame both God and Moses. “The people became impatient because of the journey. And the people spoke against God and Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food’” (Num. 21:4, 5).

In self-pity, they exaggerated their plight. They did have food – good food, bread from heaven - but they lusted for variety. They must have had *some* water or they would have died, but they evidently didn’t have it in the quantities they longed for. They did not remember that if it had not been for their rebellion they would already be in the land, and what they described as “miserable food” would long ago have been replaced with milk, honey, and the good corn of the land.

They refused to admit that those who were slain in the wilderness had died because of their own unbelief and disobedience. Their complaining, too, was the direct result of unbelief. If they had believed that they were to spend only forty years in the wilderness – as God had told them – they would have realized that the end of their journey was less than a year away! They should have been looking forward eagerly and joyfully to what lay before them in their near future. Instead they were grumbling about their plight of the moment.

We also, sometimes, have wilderness experiences in our lives. When we do, however, we have Scriptures to guide and encourage us that were not available to them. David implores believers to “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him” (Psa. 37:7). Like Paul we must learn to be content in whatever state we are in. Through the strength Christ gives we can learn how to be abased, to be hungry and suffer need - as well as how to abound (Phil. 4:11 – 13). Of course we do not have the cloud that never deserted Israel, but we do have God’s promised presence. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will

never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). Even if we have *nothing* else we have *Him* – and we can be content!

In spite of their rebelliousness God did not sentence them to die in the wilderness as He had their forefathers. He had already specifically promised they would enter the land. He had told the previous generation, “Your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised” (Num. 14:31). Nevertheless, He did not overlook their sin. He chastened them for it. In Numbers 21:6 – 9 there is a short account of how He dealt with them.

They had been bitten by fiery serpents that God sent among them. Many of the people died, and those still living cried out to Moses, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” Happily, God knew better than they did what they needed. It would have served little purpose to remove the serpents, for verse six says, “they bit the people.” It was too late for a preventive measure – they needed a remedy! God may have removed the snakes, but it does not say so. He did what was imperative - He provided a remedy. He had Moses place a bronze snake on a pole so that those who had been bitten could look to it and live. “When Israel murmured, the serpent’s bite was the answer: when Israel confessed, God’s grace was the answer.”¹⁰ See Psa. 78:34, 35, 38.

This short account becomes very important due to its typology. To appreciate this fully we need to make a brief study of the third chapter of John’s gospel where this incident plays an important part in Christ’s discussion with Nicodemus.

After confronting Nicodemus with his need for a new birth, Christ reminded him of this account in Numbers. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14 – 16).

Being a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus no doubt came to Christ feeling somewhat secure - in spite of the questions Christ’s ministry and teaching had aroused in his mind. After all, he reasoned, he had a place of favor with God because of his birth – he was a descendent of Abraham! That descent from Abraham secured their acceptance with God, was a common misconception among the leaders in Israel. Christ had warned them against saying confidently to themselves, “We have Abraham as our father!” (Luke 3:8). Nicodemus was shocked out of his pride of birth when Christ said, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). He needed to be reminded that by natural birth he was not only a son of Abraham, but also a son of Adam.

With his mind still set on his physical birth, Nicodemus exclaimed, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). Christ informed him that he needed a spiritual birth. He set forth a

¹⁰ “Notes on Numbers” by C. H. MacIntosh. Published by Loizeaux Brothers, New York. Page 401.

principle that is trans-dispensational, as true for us as for Nicodemus.¹¹ “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:6, 7).

How does this relate to the serpent lifted up in the wilderness? The need for the new birth is rooted in the fact that all men are descendents of Adam. As an inherited result of what happened in the Garden of Eden the serpent of sin has already bitten them. They are already dead in trespasses and sins and only a life-giving remedy will do.

But how can God justly deliver them from the spiritual death they so richly deserve? In the case of the rebels in Numbers twenty-one, a bronze serpent was lifted up for them. This was typical of Christ of course. A serpent was fittingly chosen as the icon for it speaks of how Christ was made to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:2). It was made of bronze, since bronze in Scripture is symbolic of judgment – and our sins were judged at Calvary. It was lifted up on a pole. From a practical viewpoint, this was so everyone could see it. Typically, however, it pointed forward to the day Christ would be lifted up on the cross, bearing the judgment of God upon our sin. It was not the holiness of Christ, His righteousness, His example or His teaching, glorious as they were, that were typified by this bronze serpent. It was His death, bearing the judgment for our sin, that was portrayed! Just as the instrument of healing in Numbers was the bronze serpent, so the new life, which comes through the new birth, is provided through the instrumentality of the cross.

Under what circumstances could that bronze serpent be an instrument to bring life to the dying? Notice that this cure was available to everyone who realized his need. It was not provided just for some predetermined group in Israel, it was lifted up so all could see it. They didn’t have to wonder “Will it work for me?” They just had to look. It was not looking *at* the serpent that availed, but looking *to* it. “It came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked *to* the bronze serpent, he lived” (Num. 21:9 - NASB). It is entirely possible that there were at least some who looked *at* it, in curiosity, and knew why it was there, but did not look *to* it, assured that it would save their lives. Unless they believed God, when He promised that everyone who looked would live, they would die - with the remedy in plain sight.

So Christ was lifted up, not for a pre-chosen few, but for all – for *the world* – that *whosoever* looked to Him in faith would live (John 3:16).

How is the new birth to be brought about? Christ’s answer to Nicodemus was “[You must be] born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). The Spirit, of course, refers to God’s Holy Spirit. But what does the water represent? Theologians differ here. Some teach (in light of Mark 15:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; etc.) that the water is symbolic of water

¹¹ Nicodemus was mistakenly counting on his physical birth to assure a right relationship with God, and needed another *birth*. Gentiles have no such false hope, there is no Abraham in their genealogy! The same experience described as a birth to Nicodemus is put in different terms – terms that have a real meaning to the Gentiles. To them the new life is described as a new *creation* (2Cor. 5:17).

baptism. Others see the water as referring to the water breaking forth from the womb in physical birth. However several scriptures indicate that the water here is the “water of the word” (Eph. 5:26). Peter told those to whom he was writing, “[You have] been *born again*, ... through the *word of God* which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:23). Since the Word of God is so important to the new birth that it is singled out by Peter as providing it, surely Christ would not fail to mention it. Mention it He did – symbolized by water.

In order to be saved, to be born again, a man must believe – as is emphasized in John three. But how does faith come? It comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Therefore the word of God, as Peter declared, is instrumental in the new birth. As to the Spirit, He has inspired men to write that word, brings conviction when it is preached, and accomplishes the miracle of that birth. Truly one who is saved has been born again by the *word of God* and the *Spirit of God*. Further indication that this is the true interpretation is found in the Old Testament.

Nicodemus was expected to know about the new birth. “Jesus ... said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?’” (John 3:10). Therefore “these things” must be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Personal new birth seems to be at least suggested by name changes (Gen. 17:5, 15; 32:28). It is *taught* regarding Israel as a nation. “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or *shall a nation be born* at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children” (Isa. 66:8). This national new birth of the nation, in the day when all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:10; etc.), is described, in Ezekiel thirty-seven, in terms of a resurrection.

The resurrection of the valley full of dry bones is not a physical resurrection of believing Israelites – in spite of the repetition of the word “graves” in verses twelve and thirteen. Such a physical resurrection will, of course, take place (Rev. 11:18), but that is not in view here. This becomes clear when we consider the enlightening preview of Ezekiel thirty-seven in the preceding chapter.

“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.

²⁵ Then I will sprinkle *clean water* on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

²⁷ I will put *My Spirit* within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

²⁸ Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek 36:24-28).

Here, as in chapter thirty-seven, God accomplishes this new birth – this giving of spiritual life – through “clean water” and the Spirit of God (“breath” in chapter 37). In

Ezek. 36:25 the clean water evidently symbolizes the word of God, the prophesying that is related in the next chapter.

In chapter thirty-seven this rebirth, of every Israelite who is alive when Christ appears to them at the close of the Tribulation, is brought about by the word of God and the “breath” which, entering into them, causes them to live. “He said to me, ‘*Prophecy* to these bones, and say to them, “O dry bones, hear *the word of the LORD!*” Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: “Surely I will cause *breath* to enter into you, and you shall live” ’ ” (Ezek 37:4-5).

All the dying man in the wilderness had to do to experience healing for himself was to *look* to the bronze serpent. All that the sinner today must do to have eternal life is also to *look*, in faith, to Christ as his sin bearer. Life through the new birth is available to the world, but is experienced only by “whoever believes.” Our need is greater than that of the Israelites, for it involves eternal life, not just a few more years of physical life. May we not be guilty of looking *at* the *cross* instead of looking *to* the *Christ* of the cross in faith!

It is instructive to read that Israel kept the bronze serpent and eventually began to worship it. “[Hezekiah] broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it” (2 Kings 18:4). Religious relics were as much an offense to God then as they are today. Looking to the serpent on the pole had brought life to dying men, for that serpent prefigured Christ. But they were not commanded to burn incense to it, nor did God permit them to do so. To look to it at God’s command was faith. To burn incense to it was idolatry. It had served its purpose and should have been cast aside so they could keep their eyes on the God who had seen fit to use it.

Sadly men are inclined to treasure physical reminders of the past more than the spiritual realities of the present or the glorious expectations of the future. Millions can become excited about ‘The Robe’ in which Christ was buried who have missed the robe of righteousness that His death purchased for them. ‘A piece of the true [?] Cross’ is all but worshipped, while “the preaching of the cross” is shamefully neglected. Even a beautiful ‘Family Bible,’ set carefully on the mantel and dusted every week, is but a relic of the lifestyle of earlier believers in the family - unless it is read and believed. Many denominations are but lifeless relics of previous generations who loved the Lord and believed and preached His word.

A morality inherited from godly parents, apart from the same regenerating work in our hearts that motivated them, admirable as it may be, is but a relic. It is a deadly relic if it provides us with a false sense of security. It is not a “futile way of life inherited from our fathers” – outwardly religious, and even orthodox, though it may appear – that redeems us, but the personal application of the precious blood of Christ to our hearts (1 Pet. 1:18, 19 - NASB). When we think that we are Christians because our parents are (as I did before I was saved), we are trusting in our physical birth as much as Nicodemus

was, and need a new birth just as much as he did. We must become *children of God*, for He doesn't have any *grandchildren*!

We must take care that we do not become satisfied with lifeless externals of devotion, and fail to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. It was not the bronze serpent that later generations in Israel should have honored with their incense, but the God who, in His way and in His time only, had used it for His purpose.

As they approached the end of their journey they passed through hostile territory. These people were not the ones they had specifically been sent to destroy, though God – knowing they would end up in conflict with them – promised they would conquer them (Ex. 33:2; 34:11). It was not the original intention that the lands east of the Jordan would be taken over as a permanent dwelling place for Israel. It later was a problem when two and a half tribes chose to dwell there. Moses tried, when possible, to be at peace with them. The king of Arad, unprovoked, attacked Israel (Num. 21:1) and paid the price of his folly – he and his people were destroyed. Sihon was approached peacefully (Num. 21:21, 22) but went out against Israel – and he, to, was defeated. It even appears that Og, king of Bashan, initiated the battle that spelled his doom (Num. 21:33).

In the very midst of this warfare God not only gave them military victories, but provided deliverance from the serpents, gave them water from the well, and a song to sing (Num. 21:16 – 18).

Barak, as narrated in the following chapters, launched a different kind of attack. He sought to turn Israel's own God against them. One might think that this would not be difficult considering the record of unbelief, disobedience and rebellion they had amassed. However, in a special and limited way, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Their God did not turn against them – He defended them. This attack was launched in the spiritual realm and was so significant that the next three chapters are devoted to it.

In our warfare also the real battle is spiritual. Not much is said by Paul as to how to combat the persecution we may face, but he has a lot to say about the spiritual warfare.

The last place we should expect to see a battle is with fellow believers. Sadly, however, this is where the battle often rages, and Paul warns against it. "If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Gal. 5:15). Even opposition by purveyors of false doctrine are to be handled with graciousness.¹² "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:24 – 26). In any

¹² Even those who preach "another gospel" are not to be engaged in physical warfare. It is left up to God to curse them (Gal. 1:9). "Their mouths must be stopped," warns Paul (Titus 1:11), but that may best be accomplished by faithful and powerful teaching of the Word – speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) - not by burning them at the stake.

case, “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:3, - 5). “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

We will find, as Israel did, that living at peace with all men is not always possible. But, for us, we are not to engage in physical conflict as Israel, under God’s guidance, did. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:18 - 21).

In their physical conflict God gave Israel victory after victory. In our spiritual battle, because He has already disarmed principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them (Col. 2:15), we are promised victory also. “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14).

BALAAM AND BALAK

(Numbers chapters twenty-two through twenty-five)

The Prophet (Numbers 22:1 - 41)

Israel has complained and grumbled since the day Moses returned to Egypt to deliver them. They have challenged his leadership and accused him of attempting a clever genocide against them. They have made idols to worship and rebelled against God's orders to enter the land. God has sent plagues among them, caused the earth to open and swallow some of them. He has sent fiery serpents among them and threatened twice to destroy them and start over with Moses. He has caused them to wander around in the desert until a whole generation of them died. The question forces itself on our attention, "Has God cast away His people?"

After Israel had experienced an even more serious "Kadesh-barnea" in Acts seven, Paul posed the same question. He answered it clearly, forcefully and finally with two words, "Certainly not!" (Rom. 11:1). At this point in Numbers, four chapters are devoted, basically, to answering the same question. God foils the plot of a clever and determined king, and dictates and controls the message of a hireling prophet, to assure all concerned that Israel has not been cast away. They will, at long last, enter the land of promise. In the midst of all their shortcomings He demonstrates that He loves them and holds out a glorious future for them.

Balaam comes on the scene out of total obscurity and holds our attention for three complete chapters and, even though Balaam is not mentioned in chapter twenty five, the events recorded there are linked firmly to his teaching. Who was this man? Was he a mere heathen soothsayer who passed himself off as a prophet of God? Or was he a true prophet who yielded to the temptation to become rich and powerful, and became a hireling prophet?

Some scholars view Balaam as a "pagan prophet" who "specialized in animal divination. He would inspect the liver of a ritually slain animal to ascertain from its shape and markings the will of the gods."¹ There is no mention of "gods," or the livers of ritually slain animals, in the text. This view rests on the occurrence of the words "soothsayer," "diviner," "divination," and "sorcery" which appear in the Scriptures concerning Balaam.

In Numbers 22:7 the delegation sent to obtain the services of Balaam carried "the diviner's fee" in their hands. Whatever Balaam was in reality, these Baal worshippers would think of him as a diviner. In Numbers 23:23 God assures Balak that his plan to curse Israel through divination will not work. When we are told that Balaam "did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery" (Num. 24:1) we need to see what he did those "other times." In Numbers 23:3, 4 and again in verses 15, 16, Balaam went to meet the

¹ From a footnote on Num. 22:5 in the New King James Version of Nelson's Study Bible.

Lord, and the Lord spoke to him. There is no indication that he was inspecting livers of sacrificed animals. When the appellation “soothsayer” was applied to him later in the book of Joshua, it was the dark side of his character that was in view, and he was called a soothsayer in derision (Josh. 13:22).

Other scholars take the view that Balaam was a true prophet of God who went astray through his love for money and honor. “The man who lives before us in these chapters has not only a considerable knowledge of, but a very large amount of faith in, the one true God; he walks with God; he sees him that is invisible; the presence of God, and God’s direct concern about his doings are as familiar and unquestioned elements of his everyday life as they were with Abraham’s. ... Men like Balaam, who probably had a hereditary claim to his position as a seer, remained purely monotheistic in creed, and in their hearts called only on the God of all the earth, the God of Abraham and of Nahor, of Melchisedec and of Job, of Laban and of Jacob. If we knew enough of the religious history of that land, it is possible that we might be able to point to a tolerably complete succession of gifted (in many cases divinely-gifted) men, servants and worshippers of the one true God, down to the Magi who first hailed the rising of the bright and morning star.”²

The latter view appears to be far the most likely portrait of Balaam. We will view the text with this assumption in view. As legitimate as his *office* may have been, the evil in his *character* becomes more and more evident as the story progresses. He eventually promoted immorality to gain his objective, became a symbol of evil, is tagged with the sobriquet “soothsayer,” and died at the hands of Israel’s army.

This does not prove that he was not, in the beginning at least, a prophet of God, but it does demonstrate a vital truth stated by Paul in First Timothy. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:9, 10). Toward the close of the Old Testament history Micah complained that Jerusalem’s leaders had fallen into the same trap. “Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money” (Micah 3:11).

A deterioration of principle and practice with regard to truth, similar in some respects to what happened to Balaam, is set before us in Second Timothy. Those who fail to study the word of truth and rightly divide it (2 Tim. 2:15) have a tendency to go astray from the truth (2:18). If they fail to come to repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth (2:25), they may spend their lives and waste their talents “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (3:7). From there it is but a short step to opposing the truth (3:8). Eventually, for some at least, they end up turning their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (4:4). This full descent is, fortunately, not often

² The Pulpit Commentary, volume 2, pages 288, 289 of the section on the book of Numbers.

experienced in any one man's life, but it has characterized the history of all too many Christian organizations, denominations and churches.

The motivating forces in this degeneration seem to be: 1. A failure to be a workman approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15). 2. A desire to teach something new and different (2:18). 3. Unwillingness to accept godly and scriptural correction (2:25). 4. A longing to be singled out and admired as a "scholar" (3:7). 5. A willingness to defend false doctrine by actively opposing the truth (3:8). 6. Eventually turning from truth altogether, turning to fables, to tickle the itching ears of those who will tickle their itching palms – giving them what they want to hear instead of what God has said (4:3, 4). Love of self and love of money (3:2) fuel the entire tragic decline.

Paul was careful to avoid this great pitfall in his own ministry. "For we are not, as so many, peddling [offering for sale] the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17). "What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:18). "For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:9).

Paul was not against preachers being supported by those to whom they were ministering. "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? ... If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ... Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:7, 11, 14). The evil comes about when preaching becomes merely a way to "make a living," or to support a coveted "lifestyle," instead of the selfless outpouring of a deeply burdened heart – trusting God to meet the needs as He sees them. May God grant us grace to follow Paul's example!

The other actor in this drama was Balak, the king of Moab. The Moabites were descendents of Lot, and Moses had been instructed not to bother them. "Then the LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession'" (Deut. 2:9). Balak was either ignorant of this protection God had arranged for them, or he didn't believe God's command would be obeyed. He and his people were terrified, "exceedingly afraid," at the prospect of being attacked by Israel and destroyed (Num. 22:3). The Midianites were drawn into Balak's scheme to defeat Israel when they were told, "This company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field" (Num. 22:4). While the Midianites also were related to the Israelites (they were descendents of Abraham and Keturah - Gen. 25:2), there was no instruction from God protecting them, as was the case with Moab.

Balak intended to fight against Israel (num. 22:11) but wanted to be sure God would give him victory in the battle. Later in Israel's history, when Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab to fight the Syrians, he had the same concern. Wisely, he wanted a word from

the Lord about the matter (1 Kings 22:5). However when he received it he foolishly ignored it. He accompanied Ahab in spite of the Lord's warning that the battle would end in defeat, and disaster befell him. Balak was not even as wise as Jehoshaphat. He did not ask for a word from the Lord, he wanted the Lord to hear *his* word, so he could tell *Him* what to do. "Curse this people for me" (Num. 22:6). I fear that we too often, even when our motives are good, fall into this same error to a degree. Prayer time can degenerate into giving God His instructions for the day instead of seeking His plan for our day. In the Philippines a sign often seen on the Jeepneys reads, "God bless our way." How much better if the signs would read, "God, teach us Your way!"

Balak knew of Balaam's good 'batting average' as a prophet. "He whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed" (Num. 22:6). He evidently knew, or thought he knew, Balaam's character also, for he took it for granted that his services were for sale. Upon Balaam's refusal to come he just offered him more riches and greater honor. 'Every man has his price' was his approach to the problem. Sadly he was right, Balaam did have his price.

It is evident that Balaam was not a mere soothsayer, dealing in divination - though, in view of his later actions, he is called that (Josh. 13:22). When he was summoned to curse Israel he did not consult the liver of an animal for guidance, he consulted the Lord (Jehovah) his God (Num. 22:18). God heard his request and gave him a very clear and complete answer. "And God said to Balaam, 'You shall *not* go with them; you shall *not* curse the people, for they are blessed'" (Num. 22:12). His failure to take this as clear and final reminds me of a sign I saw in a private parking lot that was occasionally being invaded by an uncaring public. It read, "Just what is it you do not understand about '*No trespassing*'?"

Balaam initially followed the directions given to him by God, but his own desire in the matter is revealed in the very way he answered Balak's men. "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you" (Num. 22:13). The implication is that he *wanted* to go but God was denying him the privilege. He left the door open for further negotiations by not telling them *why* he was not allowed to accompany them. He did not tell them that God had said, "You shall not go with them; *you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed*" (Num. 22:12).

Balak sent a larger and more prestigious delegation with the offer of a 'blank check' for his services. "I will certainly honor you greatly, and *I will do whatever you say to me*. Therefore please come, curse this people for me" (Num. 22:17).

Balaam's answer begins with an impressive and laudatory statement. "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18). However he had not given up the idea of accepting Balak's offer. He hoped he could talk God into letting him have his own way. The instruction Balaam received is clear. "God came to Balaam at night and said to him, '*If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you; that you shall do*'" (Num. 22:20). He evidently took this to mean he had

God's permission at last. To grossly paraphrase a line or so from "The Night before Christmas," *Balaam went gleefully off to his bed, while visions of luxury danced through his head.* It appears that he was so eager to receive the riches and honor offered him that he did not wait for the men to call him, but just arose and saddled his donkey for the trip (Num. 22:21).

At this point Balaam chose what we call "the permissive will of God." Anything less than God's best for us falls, to some extent at least, into the category of His permissive will. When we choose God's second best for us it may put us into the wrong company, the wrong places, spiritual compromise and, eventually, may result in chastening.

Why was God so angry with Balaam when it seems He had given reluctant permission for him to go? God looks on the heart, and He knew Balaam's determination to have his own way at last. There would have been no reason for him to go with the men unless he intended to follow Balak's instructions and curse Israel. Surely he did not think that he would be handsomely reimbursed for blessing them! He seems to have been thinking, "If God has given in to me and allowed me to go to Balak, perhaps He will also allow me to curse Israel. After all, He did not say this time, 'You shall not curse the people' as He did last time. He only said, 'The word which I speak to you; that you shall do.'"

The Lord tried to "restrain the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet. 2:16). Balaam's cupidity had blinded him to the evil nature of what he was doing, and to what God was trying to tell him. His donkey had better vision than he did, for it tells us three times that she saw the angel of the Lord, and he did not. God opened the mouth of the donkey and she spoke to Balaam. He was evidently so engrossed in the honors and riches before him, and so angry at the donkey, that it didn't occur to him to marvel that a donkey was speaking with the voice of a man. This was the donkey he had ridden all his life, as the donkey reminded him, but she had never behaved this way before (v. 30). Even so he failed to grasp what God was trying to tell him - that if the donkey is worthy of death because she has disobeyed Balaam, he should, even more, be judged worthy of death since he has disobeyed God.

God gave Balaam this opportunity to judge himself, much as He did later with David. Nathan told David the story of the rich man who had taken his neighbor's lamb, instead of one from his own flock, to feed his visitor. "He deserves to die!" was David's judgment of the case. "You are the man!" was Nathan's reply (2 Sam. 12:1 - 7).

It is amazing how clearly we can see the evil when we think someone else is the culprit! Paul points out how the religious leaders of Israel in his day were experts at seeing the sins of others, but blind to the fact that they were guilty of the same offenses (Rom. 2:18 - 24).

The Lord who had opened the mouth of the donkey now opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord before him with a sword in his hand. "The

Angel of the LORD said to him, ‘Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely *I would also have killed you by now, and let her live*’” (Num. 22:32, 33). Both with David and with Balaam God was more gracious in His judgment than they were in theirs. David did not die, and Balaam was not slain with the sword (that came much later as a result of even more grievous sin -- Josh. 13:22).

When Balaam was forced to see that he had been more perverse than his donkey he admitted, “I have sinned.” His confession was shallow, however, for he still did not appreciate the seriousness of his course of action as God saw it. The angel of the Lord declared, “Your way was *perverse* before me.” In reply the best that Balaam could manage was, “*If it is displeasing -.*” The angel described Balaam’s way as “perverse.” Balaam thought of it as merely “displeasing.” Instead of thanking God for sparing his life he merely offered to turn back – if necessary. Mouthing the words, “I have sinned,” is meaningless unless it expresses a broken and contrite heart (Psa. 51:17).

Having impressed the prophet with the seriousness of his disobedience, God warned him again to speak only what He directed - and allowed him to go on his way.

Balak came out to meet Balaam and scolded him for his reticence to come at his beck and call. He replied, in essence, “Well I *did* come! But I cannot do what you want me to do unless God permits it.”

See who thinks himself the “lord” of Balaam now – expecting instant obedience, offering a reward for service! A man cannot serve two masters. Balaam tried! But he ended up completely a servant of Balak and, as a result, died at the hands of Israel (Num. 31:8).

We learn more about both Balaam and Balak as we consider the prophecies detailed in chapters twenty-three and twenty-four.

The Prophecies (Numbers 23:1 -- 24:25)

The first thing Balaam did was to offer seven bulls and seven rams on a high place of Baal. Balak’s first offering of oxen and sheep (Num. 22:40) was evidently a feast of welcome for Balaam, not a sacrifice to the Lord. He began with two serious blunders in judgment. To begin with, he offered the sacrifices in the wrong place. “Balak took Balaam, and brought him up to the high places of Baal; and he saw from there a portion of the people” (Num. 22:41 – NASB).

When Balak led Balaam to the high places, where Baal was worshipped, to make offerings to Jehovah he was leading Balaam into ‘syncretism’ - “The combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs in religion ... or *an attempt to effect such compromise*” (Webster’ New World Dictionary).

Some branches of Christendom, in their missionary work, have adopted heathen gods and practices and ‘Christianized’ them in order more easily to gain a wide following. In so doing they have joined hands with the enemies of God to stand against those who proclaim a pure gospel. This practice is surely a stench in God’s nostrils. Whether Balaam was aware of it or not, one of the very reasons God was sending Israel into the land was to destroy their Baal worship. Yet here Balak was seeking to ‘Baal-ize’ Jehovah to destroy Israel – and Balaam was a part of it all. Syncretism, whether to draw heathenism into Christianity or to link Jehovah with Baal, was no more pleasing to God then than it is today.

In the second place, Balaam overestimated the value, in God’s sight, of the offerings he was bringing to Him. He failed to realize – or recognize – that “to obey is better than sacrifice,” as Samuel told Saul many years later (1 Sam. 15:22). When Balaam was met by God he proudly informed Him, “I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram” (Num. 23:4). God had already indicated He would tell him what to say. The sacrifices were unnecessary and could only serve as bribes attempting to gain God’s approval and assistance in cursing Israel. Balaam could be bought with a price, but he found out he could not bribe God! The twenty-one bulls and twenty-one rams Balaam eventually ended up offering on high places of Baal (Num. 23:4, 14, 29) surely must have been an offense to God, stirring up His anger rather than His sympathy. God totally ignored the offerings and dictated a message that Balaam knew would infuriate Balak and all the princes of Moab.

“And he took up his oracle and said: ‘Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east. “Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!” How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; There! a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!’” (Num. 23:7 – 10)

Balaam first acknowledged that the proposed attack on Israel was coming from Balak, and admitted his complicity in it. Then he accurately described it as an attempt to denounce and curse them. He declared his inability to carry out the plan, as he was but a mouthpiece for God, and God had neither denounced nor cursed them. As Joshua recalled later, God “was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless [Israel]” (Joshua 24:10).

As he beheld this people he saw that they were not like other nations, and they stood apart from them. When Israel had arrived at Sinai - at the time they had formally become a ‘nation’ - God had said, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5, 6). Looking back on that day, forty years later, Moses reminded them of this. “You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD

did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:6 – 8). In spite of Israel’s failures, even their rebellion at Kadesh, God had not changed His mind about them, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

Israel did not always appreciate the honor, nor accept the responsibility, of being different, “not reckoning [themselves] among the nations.” There came a time when they told Samuel, “No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be *like* all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:19, 20). Under the kings, sadly, they became more and more like the nations. They began worshipping their gods and following their sinful ways. It led eventually to their dispersion among the very Gentiles they had admired and mimicked.

In a day yet future they will again seek conformity to those around them to save themselves from the persecution they have endured. They will say, “We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone” (Ezek. 20:32). It will result in “the time of Jacob's trouble” (Jer. 30:7). “In those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be” (Mark 13:19).

Happily, there will yet come a day when they will have Christ as their King, and in that day they will be gloriously set apart from the nations forever. They shall be the head, and not the tail, of the nations (Deut. 28:13). Jerusalem will be a praise in the earth (Isa. 62:7). “The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you ... For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined” (Isa. 60:10, 12).

We, too, are called upon to live in separation to the Lord as His people. When we want to be like the world around us, for whatever reason, it leads to loss of our joy and our testimony, and to chastening. Paul warns against being *conformed* to this world and urges us to be “*transformed* by the renewing of [our] mind, that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This is made possible as God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed³ into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

In the New Testament - after centuries of rebelliousness and disobedience; after chastenings and dispersions; after Kadesh-barnea and an echo of it in Acts seven – the believing remnant is assured that they are still “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9). Other nations have played their part in

³ The word “transformed” in both Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 is the word translated “transfigured” in the transfiguration of Christ. It is the Greek word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.”

history, lost their national identity, and dropped from sight. But Israel is with us to this day, and is still a nation apart. No other people in history have been persecuted and scattered as they have been and retained their national identity as Israel has. Balaam's prophetic "Not reckoning itself among the nations" was not only a statement of the status quo, but also a prophecy of their future, as God had foreseen and determined that future.

Balaam then marveled at the size of their encampment. It was so extensive that he despaired of numbering even the one fourth of them that were visible to him (Num. 22:41) from the high place where he stood. In spite of their cruel slavery in Egypt, the decimating chastenings along the way in the wilderness, and the judgmental death of the entire army that had started out thirty-eight years earlier, they were "as the stars of heaven in multitude" (Deut. 1:10).

Balaam admitted that they were a righteous nation and were destined for an enviable future. He surely had but a faint and incomplete concept the glorious future ahead of Israel, for most of the prophecies concerning the end times had not yet been written. However, even the little God had revealed to him about it was attractive indeed.

How reluctant the prophet must have been to face Balak with such a message. Not only could he almost feel the rewards slipping through his fingers, but the possibility of bitter reprisal must have crossed his mind as well. Nonetheless he delivered it faithfully.

"Then Balak said to Balaam, 'What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!'" (Num. 23:11). Later Moses recalled this overturning of the intentions of Balaam. "The LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you" (Deut. 23:5).

Balak understood the message perfectly, but he didn't accept it as final. He evidently thought that if Balaam could not curse the entire multitude he could at least curse the stragglers. "Then Balak said to him, 'Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there'" (Num. 23:13). After seven more rams and seven more bulls had been offered, Balaam met with the Lord again and received further revelation. The second prophecy was addressed specifically to Balak. "Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor!" (Num. 23:18).

Balak was rebuked for thinking that he could make God change His mind. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man,⁴ that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Balaam continued, "Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it [much as he would have liked to]" (Num. 23:20). "Why are you coming

⁴ This passage has been misapplied and used against the deity of Christ. True, God is not a man, but centuries after this He took humanity upon Him and, in a carefully documented and restricted sense, *became* a man at the incarnation.

to Me again? Have I not clearly given you your answer?” is the epitome of God’s reply to Balak.

The next verse is startling in view of Israel’s history of discontent and rebellion over the past forty years! “He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them” (Num. 23:21). God is not blind. He was fully aware of the miserable ‘track record’ of His people – and He had chastened them for it. But when the accuser came against them He saw them as under the blood of the Passover lamb and their standing before Him was flawless. Their sins had been covered in God’s sight and, positionally, He did not see iniquity or wickedness in His people.⁵ They are, in God’s sight, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). It is too bad that Balaam could not have known the truth set forth in later Scripture. “Do not malign a servant to his master, Lest he curse you, and you be found guilty” (Prov. 30:10). “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4). We *do* know this truth and are expected to remember it.

There is a notable demonstration of this principle in the life of David. In order to grasp this it is important to realize there is a difference in viewpoint between Samuel and Kings, on the one hand, and First and Second Chronicles on the other. The former books give us the history of both Judah and Israel, while the latter cover part of the history already set forth, but from a different perspective. Chronicles concerns the history of Judah alone (except when the history of Judah touches that of Israel) – and relates it **as God viewed it**. While the former books tell what happened, we often need to consult Chronicles to find out *why* it happened. Sometimes we have additional information in Chronicles, as in the case of Manasseh. Both Second Kings and Second Chronicles relate the terrible wickedness of this king, yet only in Chronicles do we learn that he had a late, but glorious, conversion (2 Chron. 33:12, 13).

In the case of David it is the *omission* of vital information that strikes the eye. Second Samuel gives us the full account of David’s sin with Bathsheba and the tragic consequences of it. In Chronicles, however, his sin is never mentioned, even when the account covers the same time in his history.⁶ Nathan told David that, even though he would not die, there would be chastening to face. “The sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun’” (2 Sam. 12:10, 11).

This prophecy was fulfilled, and faithfully recorded in Second Samuel. His first son by Bathsheba died; Amnon raped his sister; Absalom killed Amnon, rebelled against

⁵ The NASB translation – “He has not observed *misfortune* in Jacob; nor has He seen *trouble* in Israel” does not fit the context, and loses the teaching of the passage.

⁶ Compare 2 Sam. 11:1; 12:26 – 30 with 1 Chron. 20:1, 2.

his father, fully intending to kill him, and committed adultery openly with his father's concubines.

Not one of these things is even mentioned in Chronicles! Why? It was because Chronicles presents *God's* view of the matter. As He saw it, David's sin was forgiven and *forgotten*. David prayed, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions ... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities" (Psa. 51:1, 9). God's response could be couched in the same words He used concerning Israel, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and *I will not remember* your sins ... I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 43:25; 44:22). He was chastened severely, but not condemned. His sin was handled within God's family and he was not 'taken to court.'

When, as a boy, I misbehaved badly my father would sometimes take me to the woodshed where the 'board of education' would be applied to my 'seat of learning' – but he did not send me to jail. As sinful as David's actions had been, God was saying, in effect, (in Chronicles) "I have not observed iniquity in David, nor have I seen wickedness in him." (Compare Numbers 23:21).

We are in a stronger position than either Israel or David enjoyed, for our sins are not merely covered, and forgotten, but taken away. God saw them in light of the Passover Lamb, but He sees us in light of the sacrifice of Christ, the fulfillment of that Passover. Our standing, our position, is perfect and secure, but we need to give attention to our state and condition. Much as we long to bring our condition up to our position, we all fall far short. This not only gives "great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Sam. 12:14) but also gives Satan a basis for his accusations before the Lord (Rev. 12:10).

Consideration of the difference between our *position* and our *condition* reminds me of a story. A farm boy was sent out to see how the setting hen was doing. He found her carefully covering her eggs, but when one egg was broken accidentally it proved to be rotten. Assuming that the rest of the eggs were in the same condition, he reported to his father, "Her *position* is fine, but her *condition* is terrible." An old hymn puts it this way:

I hear the accuser roar
 Of ills that I have done.
 I know them well, and thousands more,
 Jehovah findeth none!⁷

God knows about our state, and knows what to do about it, but He never listens to the accuser, nor pronounces a curse upon us. Our spiritual condition, our "state," as believers is a family affair (Heb. 12:5 – 7) and will not be aired in the courtroom (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1).

⁷ The Believers Hymnbook, Pickering and Inglis, hymn number 93.

The very God that Barak was seeking to enlist to curse Israel was already with Jacob, dwelling among Israel as their King. “The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them” (Num. 23:21). While the people encamped in the valley were not fully aware of it, He was the One who had brought them out of Egypt and was protecting them as the wild ox is protected by its horns. “God brings them out of Egypt, He is for them like the horns of the wild ox” (Num. 23:22 - NASB).

Years later, when Israel demanded that Samuel should give them a king, they were still unaware they already had a King. During the period of the judges every man did what was right in his own eyes because, as they saw it, “there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Many of the things that were “right” in their own eyes were appalling and disgusting, as the samples of their behavior, given in Judges seventeen through twenty-one, illustrate. Later, when the people demanded a king, God told Samuel, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7).

During this same time period, however, in the village of Bethlehem, there was at least one godly family that knew Israel had a King. This is indicated in the name of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, which means, “My God is King” (Ruth 1:3). The lovely story told in the book of Ruth demonstrates how the nation could have been enjoying life in their land if they had recognized God as their King and bowed to His beneficent reign.

How much sorrow and frustration we could avoid if we daily recognized Christ’s place as our Lord, the Head of the church which is His body (Col. 1:18), and the Head of every man (1 Cor. 11:3). When we take over the reins, and act as king over our life, we become, to some degree at least, like the world around us. It may save us from the inconvenience and reproach of being “different” but it robs us of the blessing of walking in the Spirit and enjoying the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

“For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘Oh, what God has done!’ Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion; it shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain” (Num. 23:23, 24).

Balak, who looked upon Balaam as merely a somewhat different - and more reliable - ‘diviner,’ was told that no omen or divination could hope to succeed against Israel. What God will do in behalf of His people will be a thing at which to marvel. Under His guiding hand, and by His power, they will be as fearful to stand against as a lion killing and eating its prey.

Upon hearing this second prophecy Balak was furious. He seems almost ready to reward Balaam if he will just keep quiet. “Then Balak said to Balaam, ‘Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!’” (Num. 23:25). He could have said to Balaam, as Job said to Zophar, “Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom!” (Job 13:5).

However He still clung to the hope that Balaam would be able to curse at least a

part of Israel, so he took him to yet another location where they could behold them from a different viewpoint. One is reminded of Satan's attack against Job. When his first assault failed he did not give up. He just came at him from a new direction. If Job could not be persuaded to curse God and die when his possessions and children were taken from him, perhaps he could be made to do so when his body was subjected to catastrophic illness. Satan doesn't give up on us either. If he fails in one approach he will try another and yet another. Praise the Lord, He is as faithful in His defense of us as He was on behalf of Israel, and "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

When Balaam attempted the third time to curse Israel he took another giant step downward in his office of prophet. He finally realized that God was not going to curse Israel, so he decided he would not consult Him about it any longer. He determined to substitute his own word for the word of God. "Now when Balaam [finally!] saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness" (Num. 24:1).

The term "use sorcery" is probably descriptive of the thing from Balak's understanding of what was going on. As noted earlier, if we consider what he had done "at [the] other [two] times" there is no indication that he had used the methods of those who really were sorcerers, drawing information from the livers of animals, etc. Before the first prophecy he had said, "I will go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." Then "God met Balaam, and he said to Him, 'I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram'" (Num. 23:3, 4). Before the second prophecy he told Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet the Lord over there." Then "the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, 'Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak'" (Num. 23:15, 16). There is no indication of anything but a personal encounter with God in these verses.

When Balaam decided to 'prophesy' what *he* wanted to say, the Lord didn't let him get by with it. "The Spirit of God came upon him" (Num. 24:2). This is the first time the Spirit is mentioned in this story. In other Scripture, when the Holy Spirit came upon anyone exciting things began to happen. Tracing this expression through the Old Testament, it is apparent that God sent His Spirit upon men to enable them to do or say things they could not do, or would not say, on their own. Since God was dealing with a 'hostile witness' in the case of Balaam, He evidently put him into a trance so he could not speak for himself. His oracle became "the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open" (Num. 24:4).

In this prophecy God revealed how precious Israel is to Him. "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters" (Num. 24:5, 6). He shall "pour water from his buckets" (Num. 24:7a). Israel will be a source of blessing to the world, an extension of the promise made to his father, Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). "His seed shall be in many waters" (Num. 24:7b) probably looks ahead to the prominent place Israel, the "head" of

the nations, will have in the governing of the world, under Christ. Their King and His kingdom shall be exalted above, far above, that of Agag, “His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted” (Num. 24:7c).

It was God who brought Israel out of Egypt. He gives them strength with which they will be victorious over their enemies, whom they will totally destroy. “God brings him out of Egypt; he has strength like a wild ox; he shall consume the nations, his enemies; he shall break their bones and pierce them with his arrows” (Num. 24:8). They have a lion’s strength – and Balak should hesitate a long time before he attempts to fight them. “He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?” (Num. 24:9a).

The conclusion to this prophecy is a demonstration of the grace of God. After all Balak and Balaam had tried to do to curse Israel, God offered His gracious solution to their problem. They could, indeed, not only be spared from destruction by Israel, but be blessed through them – IF they would bless Israel instead of seeking to curse them. “*Blessed is he who blesses you, And cursed is he who curses you*” (Num. 24:9b).

History is strewn with the wreckage of nations that did not follow this edict! Our own nation has been greatly blessed in the past when it stood behind Israel and refused to have any part, as a nation, in persecuting the Jews. In contrast, we are in grave danger today of incurring God’s curse as we turn from Israel and, to save our oil supply or pacify other nations, align ourselves with Israel’s enemies.

“Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, ‘I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times! Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor.’ So Balaam said to Balak, ‘Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, “If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak”? And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days’” (Num. 24:10 – 14).

Balak refused this opportunity for obtaining blessing (by blessing Israel) and was furious with Balaam for not cursing them. Instead of taking the life of the prophet, as Balaam must have expected when Balak struck his hands together in livid anger, he was told to flee to his place. “The LORD has kept you back from honor” roared Balak. “It’s not my fault” returned Balaam, in effect, “What the LORD says, good or bad, that I must speak” (Num. 24:13).

The Lord was not finished with Balak, however. Balaam, again under constraint from the Lord, (Num. 24:15, 16), had a closing message for Balak and those who were with him, or shared his enmity against God’s people.

This set of prophecies opens with a vision of the King who will lead Israel in defeating all of their enemies. “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city” (Num. 24:17 – 19).

The Star out of Jacob, the Scepter arising from Israel, is none other than Christ, of course. He is spoken of as the Star at the beginning of the book of Revelation, and at the end of the book He, Himself, declared, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 2:28; 22:16). While most of the victories foreseen in Balaam’s view of the future have already taken place, the prophecy reaches on to His return in glory and His final victory over Israel’s enemies. It is then that He will take up the scepter and reign “where-ere the sun doth his successive journeys run,” as the hymn writer described it.

Moab is to be judged by God in the then distant future, but Israel, under Moses, did not attack them as they did Midian.⁸ Several considerations may be cited to account for this delay of their doom. First of all they were descendents of Abraham’s nephew, Lot, and God had instructed Moses, “Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle” (Deut. 2:9). Also it appears that it was not the Moabites, but the Midianites, who had taken the leading role in seducing the Israelites to idolatry and immorality. “Look, these [Midianite] women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (Num. 31:16). The Lord did put a wall of separation to isolate Israel from Moab however. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD forever”⁹ (Deut. 23:3).

Later Moab was often in conflict with Israel, but there came a time when a godly family found refuge in Moab during a famine (Ruth 1:1). The Moabitess, Ruth, came to Israel, having embraced Israel’s God (and became an ancestor of Christ - Ruth 1:16; Matt. 1:5). Still later David, the great grandson of Ruth, went to Moab to arrange for a safe refuge for his parents while Saul was seeking his life (1 Sam. 22: 3, 4).

After David became king, however, he did engage Moab in battle – and was victorious over them. He slew many of them and made servants of the rest (2 Sam. 8:2,

⁸ When Judah was later invaded by Moab, Jehoshaphat, Judah’s king at the time, called upon the Lord. “And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir; whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them; here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:10 – 12).

⁹ Although David, and Christ as well, were descendents of a Moabitess this ruling does not apply to them for descent was reckoned through the father, not the mother.

3). Solomon, as part of a plan for peace with his neighbors, married some women of Moab - and they led him into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1, 7). In the days of Elisha, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Jehoram, king of Israel, were victorious in a battle with Moab (2 Chron. 3:5 – 24).

There will come a time, still future, when Moab will be called upon to be a source of refuge for the Jews during the Tribulation. “Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler” (Isa. 16:4). Sadly, it appears they will not respond to the call for help for, later in this same chapter, it says they will be judged severely. “For on this mountain the hand of the LORD will rest, and Moab shall be trampled down under Him, as straw is trampled down for the refuse heap. And He will spread out His hands in their midst as a swimmer reaches out to swim, and He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands. The fortress of the high fort of your walls He will bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, down to the dust” (Isa. 16:10 – 12). It will be then that the Scepter shall come forth from Israel and crush the forehead of Moab and the crown of the head of tumult (Num. 24:17 – NASB margin).

Edom comes next in the prophecy. They refused the request of Moses for safe passage through their territory even though, being descendents of Esau, the Israelites were their relatives. Moses did not fight with them. Instead he led the host around them in peace. There will come a day, however, when the land through which they would not allow their brethren to pass will be possessed by others, probably by Israel. Seir will share the same fate. “Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his [Christ’s? - or Israel’s?] enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly” (Num. 24:18).

The remaining three prophecies are set off, as the others are, by the statement “he took up his oracle and said” (Num. 24:20, 21, 23).

The Amalekites were the first people to fight against Israel after their escape from Pharaoh’s army. It appears that Amalek typifies the flesh. They were descendents of Esau, whose interests were fleshly in contrast to those of Jacob. He is described as a “profane” (NKJV) or “godless” (NASB) person who “sold his own birthright for a single meal” (Heb. 12:6 – NASB). The first, fiercest, and most persistent enemy of the believer today, when he has been delivered from Satan’s power, is his fleshly nature.

We gain a picture of our battle with the flesh, and God’s victory in it, as we ponder the seventeenth chapter of Exodus (Ex. 17:8 – 16). Christ is typified twice in this narrative. The name “Joshua” is the Old Testament form of the name “Jesus.” In Hebrews 4:8 the KJV reads, “if *Jesus* had given them rest,” when it is the Old Testament *Joshua* who is in view. Joshua (“*Jesus*”) was leading the army into battle, he was their “head” (compare Eph. 1:22, 23). The people were fighting with whatever they had at the time as armor and weaponry (compare Eph. 6:13 – 17). The only weapon specifically mentioned is the “edge of the sword” (compare Ex. 17:13 with Eph. 6:17).

However the outcome of the battle was dependent on something else as well. On the top of a hill Moses stood, lifting his hands in a physical attitude of prayer, with the

rod of God in his hand. Just as Joshua foreshadows Christ as our Captain (compare Heb. 2:11), so Moses, on the top of the hill above the fray, typifies Christ as the One who makes intercession for us, enabling Him to save us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34). Praise the Lord, His hands never grow weary, as did those of Moses!

At the close of the battle in Exodus the Amalekites were defeated and God said, “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. ... Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:14, 16). Later, when Gideon became a judge over Israel, his battle was against the Amalekites as well as the Midianites (Judges 6:7, 12). Later still, this war against Amalek was entrusted to king Saul. “Samuel also said to Saul, ‘The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: “I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”” (1 Sam. 15:1 – 3).

Instead of obeying God, Saul spared “the best of the sheep and the oxen,” and also allowed their king to live (1 Sam. 15:15, 20). He did not realize that there was nothing good in Amalek. As we face the conflict with the flesh – our ‘Amalek’ – we must remember what Paul learned in Romans 7:18. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) *nothing good* dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” God had no plan for Amalek but their complete destruction. He has, likewise, no plan for our flesh but death. He does not seek to improve it, restrain it, or save what is ‘good’ out of it. Our fleshly nature is totally evil and He plans only death for it. As a matter of fact, it has already been slain, positionally, at the cross (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). It will one day be totally and finally put away when we are with Him and like Him, and it is even now to be accounted dead as we walk before Him day by day (Rom. 6:11). Any attempt on our part to tame the flesh, improve the flesh, or bring it under our control is doomed to failure. Victory comes only when we account it dead and walk in the Spirit.

The pronouncement against Amalek probably seemed too drastic and heartless to King Saul, but God knew what the Amalekites would seek to do to Israel in the future. Saul told Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, ... I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites” (1 Sam. 15:20). He must have missed some of them, however, for a band of Amalekites destroyed David’s city of Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:1) and it was, almost fittingly, an Amalekite who claimed to have killed King Saul (2 Sam. 1:6 – 10).

Another surviving Amalekite, much later, came very close indeed to totally destroying the entire nation. Remember the king that Saul had spared - Agag? In the book of Esther an “Agagite” (Esther 3:1) planned a genocide against Israel and – but for the hand of God, operating through Mordecai and Esther – could have succeeded. Haman, the Agagite, was slain on the very “tree” planned for Mordecai (Esther 7:10. “Gallows” here is literally “tree” according to the NASB margin). So our flesh finds its

death - positional, experimental, and final - at the “tree” where our heavenly Mordecai truly did die. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The “Kenites” were Midianites, for Moses’ father-in-law is called a Midianite in Numbers 10:29 and a Kenite in Judges 1:16. Though they judge themselves to be secure they will be consumed. “Then he looked on the Kenites, and he took up his oracle and said: ‘Firm is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock; nevertheless Kain shall be burned. How long until Asshur carries you away captive?’” (Num. 24:21, 22). The King James Version translates the last part of this verse, “Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.”

Commenting on verse twenty-two the Pulpit Commentary states, “Probably ‘Kain’ stands for the tribe-father and is simply the poetical equivalent of Kenite.”¹⁰ With this in view the King James Version seems to be the better translation. “Asshur” refers to Assyria, and the prophecy sees the Kenites taken captive by that empire.

Early in their history the land of the Kenites was promised to the descendents of Abraham (Gen. 15:18 – 20). During the period of the Judges at least one Kenite was a help to Israel. Heber, whose wife, Jael, killed Sisera, the General of Jabin’s army, was a Kenite, a descendent of the father-in-law of Moses (Judges 4:11, 17).¹¹ It seems that Heber - probably at Deborah’s instigation - had separated from the other Kenites and become friendly with Jabin in order to act as a spy and lure Sisera to come against Deborah and Barak (Judges 4:11,12). When utterly defeated by Israel Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Heber. The reception extended to him by Jael indicates that Heber’s heart and loyalty was not truly with Jabin. Sisera expected to be protected, but instead he was assassinated (Judges 4:17 – 21).

“And he took up his discourse and said, ‘Alas, who can live except God has ordained it? But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim, And they shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber; So they also shall come to destruction’” (Num. 24:23, 24 – NASB).

“Kittim” seems to refer to the island of Cyprus. The invasion in view is, in contrast to those preceding it, to come from the west. Whoever these conquering invaders are, they shall also be destroyed. Kingdoms and empires come and go, but they will all ultimately be put down by the Star out of Jacob, the Scepter from Israel. God will be the final judge of the nations (Matt. 25:31, 32). Only those ordained by Him, those who at that time are kind to the Jews (Matt. 25:33 – 40), will live to go into the kingdom where Christ will be the Scepter.

“So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way” (Num. 24:25). If “his place” refers to his home he must have taken time first to teach

¹⁰ The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 2, page 318 in the section on Numbers.

¹¹ See my footnote on the study of Num. 10:29.

Balak how to bring God's judgment on Israel. It was soon after the close of the attempts to curse Israel that the women of Midian put his promotion of idolatry and immorality into practice. He must also have returned, almost immediately, to oversee the implementation of his plan, and claim the rewards, for it was in Midian, only a brief time later, that he met his death.

It is instructive to notice that these prophecies shift from the frustrated attempt to curse Israel, through details of Israel's blessing, to a consideration of God's curse upon Israel's enemies. Beginning with Balak's plot, and Balaam's determination to implement it, the passage closes with Balak utterly defeated and Balaam an unwilling but helpless accomplice in carrying out God's purpose in the encounter.

New Testament Scripture takes note of three steps Balaam took downward into infamy. "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the *way* of Balaam the son of Beor, *who loved the wages of unrighteousness*; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet. 2:15). "The *way* of Balaam" was to love the wages of unrighteousness. This way is characterized as madness and God used a Donkey to rebuke him, and seek to restrain him. It is interesting that Balaam was so outstanding in his field that Balak was willing to pay a high price for his services, but when God wanted to speak to this highly respected man He used a donkey to do it!

How much better is a donkey with God's message than a Balaam with his own! God enjoys using the foolish things to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:17). There is a necessary and honored place for theology and godly theologians. However the spiritual babe, with his simple testimony for Christ, is a standing rebuke to many highly educated, but unbelieving and satanically inspired, "theologians" (1Tim. 4:1), who are ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2Tim. 3:7).

The "*error* of Balaam" was thinking he could either get God to change His mind, or that he could substitute his word for the word of God. In this he was frustrated and defeated. "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, *have run greedily in the error of Balaam* for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude11). This was the classic error of false prophets all through the Old Testament history.

Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonians knew he had not followed this path in his ministry. "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). His final message to those of us who live in the last days warns us to beware of Balaam's error. In a day when 'Christians' will be going astray from the truth (2 Tim. 2:16); opposing the truth (2 Tim. 3:8); and turning their ears away from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4) we are, very solemnly indeed (2 Tim. 4:1), warned to "*preach the word!*" (2 Tim. 4:2).

The final tragic step Balaam took into infamy is addressed in Revelation 2:14. “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the *doctrine* of Balaam, *who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*”

It is not a coincidence that in our day we are seeing men and churches that have adopted the *way* of Balaam, and rushed headlong into the *error* of Balaam, going ever deeper into his *teaching*. Moral standards have fallen to a level that allows some churches to be dedicated to, and pastored by, homosexuals. The lust for wealth and prestige, the overmastering obsession with amusements of all kinds by both churches and individuals, and the growing exaltation of experience and feelings over Scripture, are as truly idolatry as bowing the knee to Baal. “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). While Balaam was rebuked for his “way,” and frustrated in his “error,” he was *executed* for his *teaching!*

Balaam returned to *his place*. An even greater enemy to Israel in the New Testament is said to have gone to “his place.” “Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25). Before Balaam went to his place he taught Balak how to win a victory over Israel without placing a curse on them. Judas, before going to his place betrayed Christ. Both of them paid for their perfidy with their lives: Balaam was executed and Judas committed suicide. “His place” for Balaam was his home in Pethor: “his place” for Judas was, evidently, hell, which is spoken of as “his *own* place.”

The Sequel (Numbers 25:1 - 18)

From Israel’s position, their ‘standing,’ we turn, in chapter twenty-five, to their condition, their ‘state.’ Their standing before God, as His redeemed nation, was flawless, but their state before men, as individuals, rapidly deteriorated. While Balaam’s prophecies had delineated their glorious future, his teaching trapped them into a disgraceful present and doomed them to judgment.¹² God defended them against the curse Balaam longed to place upon them, but chastened them severely when they fell victim to his teaching.

“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods” (Num. 25:1, 2). While the Moabite women are the ones mentioned in these verses, the single example given here of immorality involved a Midianitish woman (v. 6 and following). Several considerations suggest that while the women of Moab invited the men to both idolatry and harlotry, it was the women of Midian who were the chief offenders in leading the men into immorality.

¹² Even after their idolatry and immorality had been judged the temptation to both remained with them. After they had been in the land for some time one of their leaders spoke about the “The iniquity of Peor ... from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD” (Joshua 22:17). Weeds pulled up still leave their seeds behind!

We are told in revelation 2:14 that Balaam kept teaching Balak, the king of Moab, to commit acts of immorality. However in this twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers it is a woman of Midian who is the prime example of this (Num. 25:6). After severely chastening His people for their sin he turned His attention to those who had lured them into it. “Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor” (Num. 25:17, 18). There is no such instruction concerning the Moabites.

When the time came for this retaliation to be carried out God told Moses, “Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people” (Num. 31:2). The Midianites are mentioned by name six times in the first nine verses of Numbers thirty-one, but there is no mention of Moab in the entire chapter. It specifically says of the women of *Midian*, “Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (Num. 31:16). Balaam taught Balak to have the women not only lead the men of Israel into idolatry but also into immorality. Yet, evidently, it was the women of Midian who were chiefly involved in this seduction – and they paid for it with their lives! (Num. 31:17).

Before the “plague” upon the men of Israel was stopped by the heroic action of Phinehas it had taken the lives of 24,000 men.¹³ This plague was very selective. All, and only, those men who were guilty died as a result of it.¹⁴ Moses pointed this out later. “Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you *all* the men who followed Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, *every one of you*.” (Deut. 4:3, 4). At long last, with the death of these men, all of the ‘rebel generation’ was dead. Only Joshua and Caleb, out of all those listed at the beginning of their march to Kadesh-barnea, remained alive. Now a count could be made of those who would actually enter the land – and this is recorded in the next chapter.

¹³ First Corinthians 10:8 gives the number as 23,000. Evidently the *total* number of those who died was 24,000, but 23,000 of them died *in one day*.

¹⁴ This is a most wonderful demonstration of the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Phinehas acted on his own initiative, but God so guided him in his decision and action that it corresponded exactly with the time God was ready to end the plague.

THE SECOND CENSUS

(Chapter twenty-six)

The Census Itself (Numbers chapter 26)

As we approach a consideration of the second census there are a few observations that may be in order. First of all, neither census was merely a statistical compilation of numbers. The numbers represented specific individuals who were known and registered by name in the genealogical records kept so scrupulously by the Jews. It mentions their “genealogical registration” twelve times, and refers to their “names” fifteen times, in Numbers chapter one (in the NASB). The second census was a counterpart of the first and, referring back to it, Moses said, “To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of *names*” (Num. 26:53). The men were not merely counted – their names were recorded.

Again, these lists did not include all of the Israelites. They did not even include the names of all the *men* of Israel. They were registrations for Israel’s army. It is significant that the Levites were not included in either list. In both passages their census was separate from that of the other tribes (Num. 1:47 – 49; 26:62). When God brought judgment against Israel at Kadesh-barnea it was specifically against “all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above” (Num. 14:29). The Levites were never numbered from twenty years old and upward. One listing is from a month old and upward (Num. 3:39), and the other from thirty years to fifty (4:47). It is clear that the Levites, not listed with the army, were not automatically included in the ban against entering the land.

When God listed the only two exceptions to the ban as Caleb and Joshua, both Moses and Aaron were still living and had been well over twenty when the census was taken. Yet at Kadesh-barnea they were not listed as exceptions to the judgment imposed. They did fail to enter the land, but it was not because of Kadesh-barnea they were kept out of it. Also Aaron’s son, Eleazar, must have been over twenty when the first census was taken,¹ yet he did enter the land.

This distinction between the Levites and those in Israel’s army is seen in the outcome of Korah’s rebellion. Dathan and Abiram, who were Reubenites (Num. 26:7 – 9), joined with Korah, who was a Levite, in his rebellion. The sons of Dathan and Abiram died with them but, even though it seems that Korah was the leader of the insurrection, his sons did not die (Num. 26:11). It made a difference with God that Korah was a Levite and Dathan and Abiram were not.

All of this has significance for us. When a group has a special relationship with the Lord He takes care of them in a special way. Israel was not counted with the nations,

¹ “And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar ... the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests” (Num. 3: 2, 3). They could not act as priests until they were 30 (Num. 4:47).

Levi was set apart from the rest of the tribes, and the priests set apart from the rest of the Levites. We also have a special relationship to the Lord. We are His own possession, set apart from all others as His very Body. This glorious relationship does not invite us to lead ungodly lives (Eph. 4:1 – 3), nor does it exempt us from chastening (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). It does, however, put us in the home environment with God rather in His courtroom. The way God dealt with Moses and Aaron illustrates this principle for, though they were not under the ban placed on the other tribes, they were chastened as individuals.

As we think of these two books of names in Numbers, several things are suggestive of the two “book(s) of life” mentioned in Scripture. We, today, are concerned with these latter books, so a study of them seems apropos at this point.²

The Books of Life (a comparison)

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life” (Rev. 3:5).

Does this verse teach, as some claim, that believers who do not live a victorious ‘overcoming’ life will have their names blotted out of the book of life, and thus be lost? Quite the contrary, it teaches that the true believer shall *not* have his name blotted out of this book. He is *secure*! The “overcomer” in this verse is one, *during the Tribulation period*, who has surmounted tremendous Satan inspired opposition and persecution to *become* a true believer, not a believer who lives an ‘overcoming’ life.

But are there not other verses relating to the blotting of names out of a book? Yes there are, but most of them do not have the book referred to in Revelation 3:5 in view!

The Key Verse

The solution to the matter is found in Psalm 69:28. This passage refers prophetically to the future leaders of Israel, who are identified in Romans 11:9, 10 (quoting from Psa. 69:22, 23) as those rejecting the Savior, even after His resurrection. Of these Israelites, hardened in unbelief, Christ, speaking through David, cries out, “Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into Thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the *book of the living*, and not be written with the righteous” (Psa. 69:27, 28). *Two* books, not just one, are in view in these verses: A book from which the names of the wicked may be blotted out and another where their names will not even be entered in the first place.

The first, called the “book of the living” includes the names of those who were *never* saved -- the very murderers of God's Son. The “life” mentioned in the title of this book could not be eternal life, for the names of wicked men are found there. It must refer to *physical* life, a record of all those, both the wicked and the righteous, who will live physically on the earth. This is the book referred to in Psalm 139:16. “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and *in Thy book* they were all written, *the days that were*

² Adapted from the book “Help in Hard Places” by W. P. H.

ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (NASB).

Names *can* be blotted out of *this* book. Whenever any man dies his name *is* blotted out of it, whether he be saved or lost. In Psa. 69:27, 28 Christ is praying (through David) that a physical judgment be brought against His murderers,³ resulting in their early and judgmental deaths. His prayer was answered in 70 ad when the Romans came against Jerusalem, burned it to the ground, and slew all the leaders of Israel and their equally guilty followers. (The believers could have, should have, and -- reportedly -- *did* escape from Jerusalem before it fell, by following the instructions given by Christ in Luke 21:20 - 22).

But there is another book referred to in Psalm 69:28. It is a book containing only the names of the righteous. It is evident, from the references to it, that men’s names are entered only when they become justified by faith and are thus, in their standing before God, totally “righteous.” Christ prays that the evil men described in Psalm 69:18 - 27 will not have their names entered into *this* book. Having rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the apostles after His resurrection, they have committed the unpardonable sin He had warned them against in Matt. 12:31, 32.

The Book of the *Physically* Living

When the Israelites made a golden calf to worship, while Moses was on the mount to receive the Law, God was very angry. He told Moses, “Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than them” (Deut. 9:14). Moses interceded for Israel and delivered them from physical extinction. A bit later he was concerned that God might even yet slay them. He prayed, “Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin --; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.” He was saying, in effect, “If You slay Israel, slay me also.” God replied, “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Ex. 32:32, 33). It is clear that this book has to do with physical life, since physical death was the threat. Ex. 32:33 links the book mentioned here back to the doom hanging over Israel, so the execution of the threat would have been a blotting of their names out of the book. The matter of eternal life is not in view in these verses.

In Deut. 29:20 Moses announced a judgment upon the ungodly and rebellious in Israel. “The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses in this book [the book of Deuteronomy] shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.” Here it is an unbeliever whose name was never “written with the righteous” whose name is blotted out from under heaven. It quite evidently refers to the book (even though the word “book” is not used) of the physically alive, and to physical death as a judgment.

³ Their sin in crucifying Him is not in view here. There He prayed “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” It is their sin at Acts seven, when they rejected Him after His resurrection, when they knew who He was - and rejected Him again, that this prayer in Psalm 69 applies.

Isaiah speaks about the time when the judgments of the Great Tribulation will be past and “the Branch of the Lord [Christ] will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for those of Israel who have *escaped*” (Isa. 4:2. See Ezek. 20:33 - 44 for details about this judgment and the fate of those who are “purged” and of those who are spared). In that day Israelites who have escaped the judgments, and are still physically alive, will see Christ, recognize Him by the nail prints in His hands (Zech. 12:10), and will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Of that day Isaiah writes, “And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem [after the judgments are over], shall be called holy [be justified], even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem” (Isa. 4:3). In other words, those of Israel whose names are still in the book of the living at that time will all be saved, and thus have their names entered into the Book of *spiritual* Life.

A large part of Psalm 109 has Judas Iscariot in view (Psa. 109:6 - 20 -- compare verse eight with Acts 1:20). Christ is speaking through the Psalmist. He says, “Let his [Judas'] posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their names be blotted out” (Psa. 109:13). The descendants of Judas were not believers, their names were not written in the book of spiritual life. It is the book of the physically alive from which their names were to be blotted in judgment -- by physical death.

Revelation 22:19 appears to be warning that those who “take away from this book [the book of Revelation]” will be slain and not live to enjoy the blessings foretold for those living through the Millennium and in the New Jerusalem. Instead, they will be “purged out” from the nation as “rebels” (Ezek. 20:38 and context). Even if the “Book of Life” mentioned in Rev. 22:19 is the book of spiritual life, there is no evidence their names have *already been entered into it*. Rather, these rebels would be denied the life and blessings that *could have been theirs* if their names had been entered into it in that day when all Israel was saved (Rom. 11:26). There is a strong possibility also that the words “*Book of Life*” in this verse should read “*Tree of Life*” as in the NASB, NIV, and other translations -- and in the Greek text in my possession. In either case it is not taking away something they already possess, but denying them something they could have obtained.

The Book of *Spiritual* Life

Daniel 12:1 may be declaring that every Jew still alive at the close of the Tribulation will be delivered from his sins. However, it seems more in keeping with the text and context to recognize here God's faithfulness in sparing the lives of the believing remnant during the Tribulation (as typified by the Hebrew children preserved through the fire in Daniel chapter three). The verse reads, in part, “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.” Jeremiah 30:7 bears testimony to this same time, “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.”

The book of *spiritual* life is not just ‘kingdom truth,’ for Paul, in one of the Prison

Epistles, speaks of it. The man who appears to have been the pastor of the church in Philippi is urged to help two women who are causing trouble in the church, and to remember that “their names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3). He is surely not merely indicating they are still physically alive. He is reminding the pastor that, in spite of the trouble they are causing in the church, they *are saved*. Compare Luke 10:20.

The rest of the references to the book of spiritual life are found in the book of Revelation. They are Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15 and 21:27. (See the previous discussion concerning the “Book of life” in Rev. 22:19.)

Those whose names are *not* written in the book called “the Lamb's Book of Life” (Rev. 21:27) shall wonder, evidently in admiration, after the Beast (17:8) and will worship him (13:8). They shall not enter into the New Jerusalem (21:27)⁴ but will be cast into the Lake of Fire (20:15).

In Rev. 3:5 Christ is *not* saying, “Some believers' names *will* be blotted out of the Book of Life, but yours will *not* -- because you are spiritual.” He is saying, in effect, “Your names may well be blotted out of the book of the living. You may die, but not as a judgment, for you will walk with me in white raiment -- but your names will *not* be blotted out of the *other* book, the book of the spiritually alive. You are true believers in a day when so much is evil and counterfeit -- you are ‘overcomers.’”

The Book of *spiritual* Life is consulted at the Great White Throne Judgment where only unbelievers are to be tried. Evidently its purpose there is to prove to *them* that they are *not* real believers, for their names are not listed and, as a result, they are cast into the Lake of Fire. See Rev. 20:12, 15.

Other Books

Just as Psalm 69:28 differentiates between the book of physical life and the book of eternal life, Revelation 20:12 reveals a difference between the book (singular) of spiritual life and the “books” (plural) containing the records of individual men's deeds. It is the information in the Lamb's Book of Life that determines *where men spend eternity*. The fact that their names are not written in the book of the redeemed is proof that they are lost, and they are cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15). But the severity of their sentence will be according to their *works*, as revealed in the “books.”

Evidently what is written in the “books” referred to in Revelation 20:12 is a record of each man's works. There is nothing there to commend him. They are dead works (Heb. 9:14), works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19) and the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). Even his “wonderful works” are seen by God as “iniquity” (Matt. 7:22, 23). His “righteousnesses” are but “filthy rags” before God (Isa. 64:6). Yet this record, written in the “books,” could have been blotted out if they had believed God and been

⁴ Rev. 21:27 does not teach that everyone whose name is in the Book of Life will be in the New Jerusalem, but only that everyone in the New Jerusalem will have his name in that book.

justified by faith!

Christ prays in Psalm 109:14 that the *sin* of the mother of Judas *not* be blotted out. Also, Jeremiah asks that the *sin* of those who have persecuted him *not* be blotted out of God's sight (Jer. 18:23). Nehemiah likewise prays concerning the enemies of Israel, "Cover *not* their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before Thee" (Neh. 4:5).

However, in gracious and wonderful contrast, God cries out to Israel, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.... I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 43:25; 44:22). David, after his tragic sin with Bathsheba, and murder of her husband, prayed, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. ... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities" (Psa. 51:1, 9).

Peter tells us what happened to those sins that were once written deeply on *our* record. Christ has borne them in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). Paul goes even deeper, to the very nature producing them. He reveals that Christ was made to *be sin* for us. The result also is more glorious. Not only are the sins taken away and the record of them blotted out, we have a positive righteousness. We are made to *be* the righteousness of *God* in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).⁵

The unbeliever, if he does not come to Christ before he dies, faces a terrible future. His name will be blotted out of the Book of physical Life -- for every unbeliever, without exception, will die physically. 1 Corinthians 15:51 is not for him! His name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life, so he is *lost*! He will face every sinful thought and deed of his entire life at the Great White Throne. His sins will all be revealed there in the "books" to condemn him.

How glorious is the lot of the true believer! He may have his name blotted out of the book of the living -- but perhaps not. He may *not* die *physically* -- *ever* (John 11:26 for the believing Jews alive at the coming in glory and 1 Thess. 4:17 and 1 Cor. 15:51 for

⁵ This imputed righteousness is the only righteousness acceptable to God for men of any dispensation. When Christ spoke of righteousness in the 'Sermon on the Mount,' He warned those listening, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20 - NASB). That it was not merely *more* of the same righteousness exhibited by the Pharisees, but a *different kind* of righteousness, is evident. He continues, "But seek ye first His kingdom and HIS righteousness" (Matt. 6:33 - NASB). This interpretation is fortified by Rom. 10:3, 4 - NASB, "For not knowing about *God's righteousness*, and seeking to establish *their own*, they did not subject themselves to the *righteousness of GOD*. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to *everyone* who believes." While this truth is amplified and clarified by Paul, it is the basis for justification of believers even in those ages before Paul came on the scene. See Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:20; 4:3.

the Body saints at the Rapture). His name is in the book of *spiritual* life and *will not* be blotted out! He will never stand before the Great White Throne to be judged, for his sins have already been judged at Calvary (John 5:24 for the kingdom saints and Rom. 8:1 for the Body saints).

The kingdom believer will be raised from the dead when Christ comes in glory, a thousand years before the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:4 - 6). Then Christ will “give *reward* unto His servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear [His] name, small and great” (Rev. 11:18 KJV). The believers of this age of grace will appear, even earlier, at a ‘judgment’ which is not for punishment of evil works, but for rewards of those whose works were done ‘by faith.’ (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6) These ‘by faith’ works are a result of God working in them (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13 -- compare Heb. 13:21) -- the only works still appearing on their records.

Even if our names are blotted out of the Book of *physical* Life we have a wonderful comfort (1 Thess. 4:13 - 18). The ‘books’ hold no terrors for us for He has wiped the pages clean. Best of all, our names will never be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life -- we have His promise!

Parallels

To relate these books to those we have in view in Numbers – the two lists of men prepared for war - notice some comparisons.

The first census, like the book of physical life, was a book of *opportunity*. Those in that census could have entered into the land of promise, but most of them “entered not in because of unbelief” (Heb. 4:6 – KJV). Their prospect had been as bright as the promises of God – but only two actually entered the land. So those whose names are in the book of physical life have the *opportunity* to live forever. After all, God did love the world and desired that all men should be saved (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The second census was a book of *realization* and *certainty*. Every man listed in it did enter the land. They were secure – they were not blotted out of this book! This is dramatically illustrated by what happened after the census was taken. Before they entered the land they were engaged in a bloody conflict with the Midianites. It was so extensive that they took 16,000 prisoners! What about the names in the census just taken? One would naturally expect many of the Israelite army to be killed in the battle. This would mean that some of those in the second census would be blotted out of the book before they had a chance to enter the land. Amazingly, this did not happen! At the close of the war the officers reported to Moses, “Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and *not a man of us is missing*” (Num. 31:49).

So, when time has run its course and eternity dawns, in spite of the furious spiritual battle believers have been engaged in, the Book of *spiritual* Life will stand complete – not one name will be missing! “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14). “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor

angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Hallelujah! What security! What a Savior!

KNOCKING AT CANAAN'S DOOR

(Numbers chapters twenty-seven through thirty-six)

The Daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1 – 11)

With the death of older generation the promise God had made concerning their children is about to be fulfilled. Now the Israelites are beginning to believe they are really about to arrive 'home' at last. The five daughters of Zelophehad illustrate the eager anticipation of at least some of the congregation. They do not have their eyes on their current plight. They are not complaining about having only "this manna" to eat, or grumbling about other things, as the Israelites were in the habit of doing. Instead, their minds are now occupied with what is in store for them on the other side of the Jordan. They now have their eyes on their inheritance in the land that is before them.

In much the same way, when we really believe that the coming of the Lord is drawing near we will, even more than those to whom Paul addressed his letters nearly two thousand years ago, have our minds set "on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). Our inheritance is not here, but in glory! As the hymn writer put it, "This world, this world, is not my home!"

However there is a problem about their coming inheritance. The land was to be divided among the men and their sons. The sisters face the problem that their father has died and he had no sons. He probably had been a part of the rebellion at Kadesh, but he had not been involved with the insurrection of Korah. Is his part in the land to be lost? Are the women to have no inheritance? God assures them that even though their father has died and had no sons, He will graciously provide a place for his family in the Land of Promise – the inheritance will go to his five daughters. (Five is the number of grace!)

As we have seen, Israel was a male dominated society. The genealogies were always through the fathers and their sons – except in passages prophetic of Christ, who would have no earthly father. See Gen. 3:15; Psa. 69:8; Jer. 31:22 where Christ's human ancestry is in view.

However, as His provision for the daughters of Zelophehad illustrates, God was not unconcerned about the women in Israel. There were times when godly women who came on the scene were greatly used by Him and given a place of honor in His word. We read of Sarah, Jael, Ruth, Esther, Lydia, Priscilla, Martha and her sister, Mary - to name but a few. Five women (the number of grace again) are named, or referred to, in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew's Gospel. To crown all, the only physical link of Christ to the human race was through a woman, for He had no human father. God did not discriminate against Zelophehad's daughters because they were women. Instead, they were assured they would inherit the land that would have been their father's, just as if they had been his sons. Today believing women are "sons" of God and are, equally with the men, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Titus 3:7).

The Transfer of Leadership (Numbers 27:12 – 23)

The time has come for entering the land, but both Moses and Aaron have been sentenced to die in the wilderness. Aaron has already died, now it is time for Moses also to be gathered to his fathers. How precious Moses must have been to God! He had faithfully led His people for forty long and stressful years. He had, in godly meekness, selflessly interceded for them time after time. He was a man of great faith (Heb. 11:24 – 29). Did God recall these things, quash the indictment against him, and lovingly allow him to lead His people this one last time as they entered the Promised Land? No, his single rebellion at Meribah in the wilderness of Zin was not just swept under the rug. As much as God must have loved Moses, His holiness decreed that his sin must not go unpunished!

A similar, but infinitely greater, demonstration of God's unswerving dedication to perfect holiness is seen at Calvary. There God poured out his wrath against sin upon His own Son when the sins of the whole world had been laid upon Him, when He had even been made to be sin for us. Those who think God will wink at their sin and, like a doting grandfather busy spoiling his grandson, lovingly allow them to slip, unsaved, into His presence, are in for a shock! If God were ever to allow sin to go unpunished it would have been when it was His own beloved Son who was involved – particularly since it was not *His* sin! No one will ever find himself in heaven because God, swayed only by His love, has allowed his sins to go unpunished. Those who will be in heaven will be there because Christ, to satisfy His holiness, graciously took their punishment upon Himself at Calvary. Christ's death has fully met the just demands of the holiness of God, setting His love free to receive us into His presence without compromising His righteousness. Thus it is not "by love," but "by *grace*" that we are saved (Eph. 2:8).¹ This is the secure basis upon which our salvation rests. Paul had this in mind when he declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.... For in it [not only the grace, but] the *righteousness* of God is revealed -" (Rom. 1:16. 17).

God's *grace* toward Moses is also clearly demonstrated in this chapter of Numbers. He could not righteously permit him to lead His people into the land – but He did graciously allow him to see it before he died. Even that does not fully tell out the riches of His grace toward Moses. Centuries later, when Christ was transfigured, he was at His side along with Elijah. The "high mountain" where the transfiguration took place may not have been 'in the land,' west of the Jordan, but what a place of honor it was for him! He had evidently been raised from the dead by that time, for he was present on the same basis as Elijah – and Elijah was there bodily, for he is physically alive, even to this day.

It is likely, if not certain, that a premature release of Moses from death and his passage, bodily, into heaven, is what Satan objected to in Jude nine. "Michael the archangel ... [contended] with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses." When the body of Moses was given life (before the resurrection of other Old Testament

¹ Grace, as it has to do with salvation, is God finding, in Himself alone, the righteous basis (redemption) for doing what His love longs to do concerning sinful man.

saints) and taken through Satan's territory there was a dispute. When the Body of Christ will be given life (also before the resurrection of the Old Testament saints), and taken through Satan's domain at the Rapture, there will surely be more than a mere objection from the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Perhaps one reason Christ has for meeting us in the air is to give us 'safe conduct' home through Satan's hosts of demons and fallen angels.

Moses will again appear upon the scene during the Tribulation. The sixth verse of Revelation eleven surely argues strongly that he is the second witness in the passage. The two witnesses will "have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire" (Rev. 11:6). There, as at the transfiguration, "the law and the prophets" will be represented by the lawgiver himself, and one of the outstanding prophets of the Old Testament. At that time Moses will have arrived in the land at last, for after he has been slain as a martyr² his body will be left lying in the street of Jerusalem - where he evidently had been ministering (Rev. 11:7, 8). Surely Moses and Elijah are the ones who have been chosen by God to stand at Christ's right hand and His left hand in the kingdom (Matt. 20:21, 23).

Something Peter said later indicates this. When he recalled the transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah were the ones talking with Christ, he testified that what he had seen there was "the power and coming [coming in glory] of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16). The transfiguration was a little prophetic vignette of Christ's coming to set up His kingdom - that kingdom where one will sit on His right hand and another on His left.

There is an interesting contrast between the response of Moses, and that of another prominent leader of Israel, when they were informed by God of their coming deaths. When king Hezekiah was told that he would soon die his concerns were all for himself. "Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, 'Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly" (2 Kings 20:2, 3). God graciously responded by extending his life for fifteen years. It was during those years, however, that his son, Manasseh, was born.³ Manasseh became the most wicked king Judah ever had, and his sins were directly responsible for the judgment that befell Judah later (2 Kings 23:26). If Hezekiah had accepted God's time for his death there would never have been a Manasseh to plunge Judah into ruin!

When God told Moses of his coming death his first response was understandable. "I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon" (Deut. 3:25). But, when God said "No," he did not, as

² If it is objected that in this case Moses will have died twice, when Scripture says it is appointed to man to die once (Heb. 9:27), it must be remembered that those raised from the dead by Christ during His ministry certainly died again later. A resurrection of Moses in the past would be, as theirs was, a simple restoration of life (possible even for one whose body has already begun to decay - John 11:39), not the final resurrection with an immortal body.

³ Manasseh was only twelve years old when his father died (2 Kings 20:21; 21:1).

Hezekiah did later, continue to plead his case with bitter tears. His major concern was not for himself, but for God's people who would be left behind. "Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: 'Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd'" (Num. 27:15 – 17). He accepted God's decision in the matter and, it seems, was raised from the dead that He might, in the future, have a glorious ministry - and a place at the side of the King of kings during the Millennium. Though not expressed in words, "Thy will be done" was the heart of the prayers of Moses - and it should be a constant and vital part of our prayers as well. How much better it would have been for Israel if Hezekiah had also prayed, "Thy will be done"!

Joshua was God's choice for a successor to Moses. He had already led the Israelites in their battle against Amalek (Ex. 17:8 – 13), proved himself at Kadesh-barnea, and had been closely associated with Moses on other occasions. He was to have a brief 'internship' under Moses when "some of [Moses'] authority" would be put on him shortly before Moses died (Num. 27:20).

Joshua was, in some respects, typical of Christ (even bearing the Old Testament form of the name "Jesus"). He took Israel into the land, which Moses was not allowed to do. Similarly, Christ accomplished what the Law of Moses could not do. "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Historically, however, Joshua was not 'another Moses.' The dispensation of law, introduced by Moses, continued – but there were some significant changes within that dispensation. When Moses died he had completed the body of truth that would be the guiding light and 'constitution' for the coming generations. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:32).⁴

There are three places that speak of a completion of Scripture. Moses completed the revelation of the law. There was a great deal of revelation later concerning how Israel lived under that law, and concerning things to come. But never, in the rest of the Old Testament, is anything revealed that added to or deleted from the "Law of Moses," for those living under it.

Paul was given the task of completing that portion of the word of God that has to do specifically with this age of grace. He told the Colossians, "The stewardship from

⁴ The Mormons use this passage to justify their contention that there are to be further prophecies after the warning given in Rev. 22:18. They fail to see that Moses spoke of another prophet to follow him (Deut. 18:15). John makes no such statement concerning the completion of the New Testament.

God ... was given to me for you, to [complete]⁵ the word of God, *the mystery* which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but *now has been revealed* [in Paul's writings] to His saints" (Col. 1:25, 26). When Paul laid down his pen the body of truth (the "word of God") dealing specifically with this age of grace was complete.

To the apostle John was given the honor of completing the Bible as a whole. "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18, 19).

As noted before, when Moses died the dispensation did not change, but there were changes within it. They no longer had the miraculous provision of daily food. "Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year" (Josh. 5:12). The pillar of fire by night and cloud by day was withdrawn. Now it was necessary for Joshua to look to the High Priest for the kind of guidance the cloud had provided. "He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. *At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in*, he and all the children of Israel with him; all the congregation" (Num. 27:21).

True, it is said at least fourteen times in the book of Joshua, "The Lord said unto Joshua" – or the equivalent. However his relationship to the High Priest was not the same as the relationship that existed between Moses and Aaron. Eleazar was to inquire before the Lord, at times at least, for Joshua, but Aaron never inquired before the Lord for Moses. Moses received his instructions directly from the Lord. God had, earlier, reminded Miriam and Aaron, "I speak with him [Moses] face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Num. 12:8). Aaron was not Moses' source of truth, as Eleazar was to be, to some degree at least, for Joshua. Moses received God's messages by direct "face to face" revelation. Aaron was but a mouthpiece for Moses, to communicate that truth to the people. The relationship between the two brothers had been clearly defined when they received their call to service. God told Moses, "He [Aaron] shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God" (Ex. 4:16).

Just as there were changes within the dispensation of law shortly following the completion of the revelation given through Moses, there were changes within the dispensation of grace upon the completion of the revelation entrusted to the apostle Paul. For a time there had to be those in the church who would receive, directly from God, at least some of the truths later written down for us in Paul's epistles. However Paul warned the believers at Corinth that this gift of prophecy would not continue in the

⁵ The Greek word used here is usually translated "fill" or "fulfill," but it seems to have the idea of completion even then. It is actually translated "complete" twice in Colossians (Col. 2:10 and 4:12).

church. “But whether there are prophecies, they will fail” (1 Cor. 13:8). The prophecies were not to fail in the sense that the things prophesied would fail to take place. The gift itself was to be withdrawn. “For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect [complete] has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (1 Cor. 13:9, 10). Notice that the perfection in verse ten is not in contrast to that which is *inferior*, or *defective*, but in contrast to that which is *incomplete* (v. 9).

When the transition period (covered in Acts chapters 9 through 28) was over and the revelation concerning this age of grace was complete, and in the hands of the church, the supernatural gift of prophecy was no longer needed – and was withdrawn. But, after the transition was largely past, Paul lists prophets as gifts to the church. “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11, 12). Why are there to be prophets in the church at this late date when the gift of prophecy was to be withdrawn?

It is important to see that there is a difference between those prophets who were given the responsibility of writing the New Testament Scriptures (and those temporarily possessing the supernatural gift of prophecy) on the one hand, and the “prophets” in the church today on the other. Those receiving their message direct from God were fore-tellers, while we, giving out what God has already revealed, are forth-tellers.⁶ The “prophet” today does not experience either revelation or inspiration. It is the work of the Spirit in illuminating what has already been revealed, and written down by inspiration, that constitutes him a “prophet.” He is not to be a fore-teller, but a forth-teller of God’s message. Moses was a prophet⁷ in the miraculous sense. He was a fore-teller. Aaron was not. He may be considered a prophet in the non-miraculous sense however. He was a forth-teller of what had been revealed to Moses.

We can, as we study the word of God, in non-miraculous ‘prophesying,’ give out the truths revealed there. We can even teach prophecy, but we must be careful we do not try – in the miraculous sense - to prophesy.

Further Instructions (Numbers chapters twenty-eight through thirty)

Concerning offerings (Numbers chapters twenty-eight and twenty-nine)

Without a detailed analysis of the instructions given by Moses in these two chapters there are precious truths we can glean from the typology inherent in the passage. Christ is in view all through the two chapters. After a short introduction to the section, in the first two verses, the “continual burnt offering” is introduced in verses three through

⁶ Putting Ephesians 4:11, 12 into our present terminology, it appears to be saying that God gave to the church missionaries (sent ones – “apostles”), Bible teachers (to speak in seminars, teach in seminaries, etc. – “prophets”), and local evangelists and teaching pastors.

⁷ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deut. 18:15).

eight. The primacy of the continual burnt offering is quite apparent. It was offered morning and evening of every day, and it was not to be replaced by the other offerings. Sixteen times in these two chapters the other offerings are “besides” or “in addition to” the continual burnt offering

This offering has nothing to do with the sins of men, as do the “sin offering,” the “trespass offering,” the offerings on the “Day of Atonement,” etc. In the continual burnt offering the cross is portrayed as the offering up of Christ in loving obedience to the Father. Perhaps the primary incentive leading Christ to Calvary was not to save sinful men – as vital and gracious as this was - but to please His Father. Important as the other offerings were, the one that displayed Christ’s obedience to His Father’s will was the primary one, the only one offered twice a day every day.

This supreme motivation in submitting to death is revealed in Hebrews ten. “When He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, *I have come*; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; *To do Your will, O God*’” (Heb. 10:5 – 7). His loving obedience, from a heart that shared the same gracious concern for men that the Father cherished, led Him to Calvary. “By [His submission to] that will [of the Father] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:10, 14).

If not one sinner ever believed the gospel, and the entire race ended up in a well-deserved hell, His sacrifice would not have been in vain. He has honored the Father by doing, from the heart, His will. Also the Father stands exonerated of blame for the lost condition of mankind, for they have been provided, at infinite cost, with a way to be saved.

This consideration is important in theology, for two views that seem equally false, to this author, are based on the assumption that *everyone* for whom Christ died *must* be saved. Otherwise, they argue, Christ’s death would, in the case of the lost, have been in vain. The Universalist takes this view and draws the conclusion that, since Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:15) all must be saved. The ultra-Calvinist takes the same view but draws a different conclusion. He reasons, “Since all for whom Christ died will be saved, and since – obviously – not all men will be saved, He must have died only for the *elect* sinners.” Actually, the ultra-Calvinist is a kind of Universalist also. He just redefines the “world” in John 3:16 and the “all” in 2 Cor. 5:15 and 1 Tim. 2:4. “The *elect* world” and “all the *elect*” fit his theology better.

Paul touches on this subject in Corinthians. His argument in 2 Cor. 5:14 and 15 may be put this way, “The fact that Christ died for *all* [not just for the elect] proves that *all* died in Adam, therefore all need His provision. But His death, though for all, is only effective for ‘those who live’ [verse 15]. Christ died for *all* [universal provision] that *those who live* [limited acquisition] should ... live ... for Him.” The universal provision -

the love of Christ for all - constrains us to be concerned for all. The limited acquisition - the need for faith - constrains us to preach to them, to “persuade men” (verse. 11).

Another lesson we gain from these two chapters is that all of the offerings were to be a “sweet aroma” to the Lord. The continual burnt offering was a sweet aroma (28:8), but so were the others. The expression “sweet aroma” is found eleven times in these two chapters. Our sin made it necessary for God to “forsake” Christ as He hung suspended between heaven and earth – as though rejected by both. However the Father was “well pleased” with His Son when He was dying on the cross (Isa. 53:11, 12) as surely as when He was carrying out His ministry (Matt. 17:5).

The typology here, as in many other places in Scripture, reminds us that Christ was without any sin of His own when He was made to be sin for us. Nine times in these chapters it is stipulated that the offerings are to be “without blemish.” This seeming paradox of a sinless Christ being judged for sin is clarified for us in Second Corinthians. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Or, as it is put elsewhere, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

There is a wonderful truth embedded in the eight days of offerings related in Numbers 29:12 – 38. Each day, for seven days, two rams and fourteen lambs were offered. Along with these some bulls were to be offered also. The number of bulls was decreased by one each day – from thirteen on the first day to seven on the seventh day. It is as though the number of bulls offered was a ‘countdown’ to something very important. The number eight speaks of a new beginning, and on the eighth day only one bull, one ram and seven lambs were offered (Num. 28:35, 36).

From Leviticus 16:29 we learn that the tenth day of the seventh month (Num. 29:7) was the Day of Atonement. Here, only five days later – on the fifteenth day of that month (Num. 29:12) - began the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34). It was then that the countdown began. After seven days of feasting the eighth day was a special day, a holy convocation.

The Day of Atonement typifies the salvation of all Israel. This should have taken place when their Messiah gave His life for them. God knew, however, that they would reject Him instead. He knew it would not be until later, at the return of Christ, that Israel would enter into the redemption accomplished for them on that day. The time prophecy in Daniel 9:25 – 27 recognizes this. The five days between the Day of Atonement and the beginning of the countdown seem to point to the graciousness of God as He ‘stopped the clock’ of Daniel nine, after only sixty-nine “weeks” had expired. This suspension of the time schedule was introduced by God to give Israel time to decide how to respond to the offer made to them by Peter in Acts 3:19 – 21. This period between the Day of Atonement and the countdown was five days – for five is the number of grace.

The seven days of the countdown may reflect the seven years (after the clock has started ticking off the time again) between the cross and the crown indicated in Daniel 9:26, 27. During those seven years Israel will be going through great tribulation, but the faithful among them can be rejoicing (if they understand and believe the prophecy of Daniel) in the expectation that the kingdom will follow at the close of those seven years. It will be a countdown to glory for them.

The holy convocation of the eighth day pictures the arrival of that long awaited kingdom. On that eighth day there was to be no "laborious work" (Num. 29:35 – NASB), for the kingdom will not come as a result of any work of man. The number of bulls and rams was dropped to one each on that eighth day, to typify the once for all sacrifice of Christ making the kingdom possible. The number of lambs was dropped to seven typifying the completion and perfection of what Christ has done to establish it. This convocation not only concluded the Feast of Tabernacles, but also was the last and crowning day of the last feast of Israel each year. It signifies the glorious conclusion of God's program with Israel, a program that has spanned many centuries, and will bring them at last to the long anticipated "times of refreshing" (Acts 3:19). What a day of rejoicing that will be!

There is no revelation as to when Christ will come for us. We do not have a time oriented countdown to the Rapture. Instead we have the blessed hope that Christ could, and might, come **today! Maranatha!**

Concerning vows (Numbers chapter thirty)

There are some principles in this short chapter that may well be applied today, even though the application of them here is to Israel under the law.

A man should keep his word, even when he has not formally sworn an oath to bind himself. "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; *he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth*" (Num. 30:2). Jephthah found out how tragic and painful this can be (Judges 11:30 – 35). "Better not to vow than to vow and not pay" (Ecc. 5:5). We are to keep our 'vow' to give our bodies a living sacrifice, but also we are to speak the truth with our neighbors (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:25).

In keeping with the woman's role of dependence on her husband she is given a 'way out' if she makes an unwise or foolish vow. The husband can protect her from it if he speaks up at once (Num. 30:12).

The responsibility of the parent over the child (here a female child) is only as long as she is in her youth and in her father's house (Num. 30:16).

If there is an objection to a vow taken by a woman, it must be made at once or it is not valid (Num. 30:4, 11, 14). The rule is, "Speak now, or forever after hold your peace." Silence is construed as consent.

The husband who does not respond to the vow of his wife is responsible for her guilt (Num. 30:14, 15).

There is symbolic significance in the contents of this chapter as it portrays the relationship of Israel to the Lord. Israel was looked upon as the “wife of Jehovah” in many Old Testament passages. We discover the time when this relationship was formalized through a prophecy of Ezekiel. “‘I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful ... When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; ... so I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,’ says the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 16:7, 8).

At that time the newly espoused wife of Jehovah made a vow. “Then all the people answered together and said, ‘*All that the LORD has spoken we will do*’” (Ex. 19:8). They failed to realize that “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). God knew this but He did not overrule their vow when it was made. Later He made their vow void, for he both proclaimed and demonstrated their complete inability to keep it. As a result (that He had both anticipated and welcomed) He bore their guilt on Calvary. “Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them. But if he does make them void after he has heard them, then *he shall bear her guilt*” (Num. 30:14, 15). Praise the Lord He also bore our guilt even though we were not involved with Israel’s vow.

The Slaughter of Midian (Numbers chapter thirty-one)

To understand this chapter we must recall briefly the story of Balaam and Balak. Balak had been terror stricken by the approach of Israel. They were a massive army, and word had no doubt reached them of the way their God had been with them for the past forty years. He shrewdly reasoned that only if their Protector could be turned against them could they be defeated. So he hired Balaam to influence Israel’s God to curse them. When the attempt failed and Balaam was forced to bless them instead, another plan was put into action. At Balaam’s instigation the women of Midian seduced the men of Israel and led them into worshipping their gods.⁸ The scheme worked to a point, for 20,000 Israelites died without the Midianites raising a sword.

As to their *standing* before God (as Balaam had prophesied) He had not beheld iniquity in their ranks. However, in their *state* before men God was faithful to administer chastening. Let us never think for a moment that, because we have the imputed righteousness of God by faith, we can sin with impunity

While His people endured chastening, those who led them into their sin experienced judgement. Barak and his allies could not only have escaped this judgment - they could have been blessed instead – if they had only seized upon one of the prophecies of Balaam. “Blessed is he who blesses you [Israel],” he had proclaimed. Instead they gathered the other side of this prophecy to their breasts in blind unbelief and pursued

⁸ The relative blame resting on Balak, the Moabites, and the Midianites has been addressed earlier in connection with chapter twenty-five.

their hatred of Israel to the limit. “Cursed is he who curses you [Israel]” was the pronouncement of their doom. In seeking to enlist God to curse His own people they were cursed themselves, incurring His wrath. A similar choice is set before men today, but the touchstone of faith is not, now, concern for Israel (much as we should be concerned for her) but faith in Christ as Savior from sin. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

The last ‘official’ responsibility of Moses was to deal with the Midianites. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people’” (Num. 31:1, 2). Although Joshua had already been installed as the new leader of Israel, he is not even mentioned in this chapter. It is “Moses and Eleazar the priest” who take charge (Num. 31:6, 12, 13, 26, 31, 41, 51, 54). Very possibly Joshua may have led the army, but the only one mentioned by name who went out to battle was “Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest.” Although swords were surely used in the battle, Phinehas accompanied them “with [only] the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand” (Num. 31:6).

Moses was still their leader, for this was to be the military capstone of that leadership. He had led them for forty years and had brought them to the Jordan opposite Jericho. He was not to leave any unfinished business behind him east of the river. Eleazar shared the leadership because this battle was on religious grounds. Balak and Balaam had come against Israel with an attack in the spiritual realm. Phinehas was there partly because it was his zeal for the Lord that had terminated the plague God had brought against Israel when they had sinned at Peor. Mention of what he took into battle with him is at least suggestive of the fact that our warfare, even more decidedly than with Israel's, is a spiritual warfare. Fittingly, our weapons are – as were the ‘weapons’ Phinehas carried with him – fitted to that kind of battle. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:12, 13). “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:3, 4).

All of the males in Midian (the adults - the present danger, and the boys - the threat of danger in the future) were slain. When the women were spared Moses was angry. “And Moses said to them: ‘Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD’” (Num. 31:15, 16). The girls who were virgins – and could not have taken part in the seduction of the men of Israel – were spared. The rest were slain.

During this battle God gave Balaam the answer to his perfidy. He was killed with the sword.

This signal victory is significant for several reasons. It not only avenged a great wrong, it also secured the land east of the Jordan from attack later, when the soldiers of two and a half tribes crossed the Jordan with the rest of the army leaving their families behind – largely defenseless. In addition, it was God's answer to the fears that had led to the fiasco at Kadesh-barnea. They saw what God could do! In a battle involving thousands of soldiers on each side, the victory was complete and without the loss of a single man! (Num. 31:49). This not only demonstrated to them that their fears at Kadesh had been groundless, it was also a strong encouragement for their troops as they faced the battles just ahead of them across the river.

When our spiritual battle is over, in spite of many hardships and seeming defeats in local skirmishes, Christ will wear the victor's crown, and He will not have lost a single soldier! We will even share in the 'spoils.' Christ has already defeated Satan at the cross and the empty tomb. The war is already won.

His be the Victor's name Who fought our fight alone:
 Triumphant saints no honor claim, Their conquest was His own.
 By weakness and defeat He won the meed and crown,
 Trod all our foes beneath His feet, By being trodden down.
 He hell in hell laid low; Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;
 Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so, And death, by dying, slew. ⁹

May we rejoice that, however fiercely the conflict rages, we are only carrying out 'mopping up operations'! We are on the winning side!

The 'Dropouts' (Numbers chapter thirty-two)

A most unexpected and disturbing development occurred just before God's people, at long last, entered the Promised Land. Thirty-eight years before, the entire congregation had turned back from entering it because they feared the giants and a "land that devours its inhabitants." Here two and a half tribes (about 20% of the nation) turned back again at the very last minute. This time it was not because they feared the land or its inhabitants, for they willingly sent their armies across the Jordan with their brethren. It was because they preferred to choose their home for themselves instead of accepting God's choice for them. Before, they had *turned back* - longing for Egypt. This time they failed to *go ahead* - satisfied with a relatively attractive area in the wilderness.

The home they chose for themselves was to be in what they considered an acceptable part of the wilderness. Whether they realized it or not, however, they would no longer have the manna to feed them, the cloud to shelter them, or the leadership of either Moses or Joshua. They had their eyes only on good pasture for the wealth of livestock God had granted to them. What had happened to their longing for the milk and honey, their expectation of living in the land promised to them by the Lord, the land to which He had patiently led them for the past forty years?

⁹ The Believer's Hymn Book, Pickering and Inglis, London, England. Hymn number 93.

How often wealth has kept men from God's best – all too often kept them from even knowing God at all! The rich young ruler “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:22). “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” the disciples were told when the young man had departed (Luke 18:24). What a contrast exists between those who allow riches – or the love of riches – to keep them from God's best and those who, living on the right side of their Jordan, take joyfully even the spoiling of their goods!

This decision was not the will of God for them, though He allowed them to have their way. Several things indicate this. When Moses sent a message to Sihon king of Heshbon, he made a peaceful proposal. “You shall sell me food for money ... and give me water for money ... until I *cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD our God is giving us*” (Deut. 2:28, 29). In Numbers 34:10 – 12 the eastern border of the land they are to inherit, and divide among them, is the Jordan River from the Sea of Chinnereth (the Sea of Galilee) to the Salt Sea (The Dead Sea). Also, if it had been God's will for them to live east of the river surely Moses would have known about it. Instead it came as an unwelcome surprise to him, and it angered him. It must have seemed incredible to Moses that, while he grieved over his own exclusion from the land, these who could enter it would choose not to do so.

Sadly, the river became a dividing line to cut them off, to a degree, from the rest of the tribes. Only a short time later it almost caused a civil war (Joshua 22:10 – 12)! By that time the separation was already a part of their thinking. The tribes in the land registered a strong protest against the eastern bloc. “Thus says *the whole congregation of the LORD*: ‘What treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the LORD?’” (Joshua 22:16). How could the nine and a half tribes in the land consider themselves “the whole congregation of the Lord” if they had not come to look upon the rest of the tribes as outsiders? The ‘easterners’ themselves evidently feared just such a division, for they had built a replica of the bronze altar on their side of the river to remind them that they were still a part of Israel (Joshua 22:24, 25).

It is worthy of notice that when Deborah listed those who had responded to her call for help against the Canaanites she admitted that Reuben had had “great resolves of heart” but added that they had not done anything about it. They had remained by their sheepfolds (Judges 5:15, 16). Also neither Gad nor the half tribe of Manasseh were even mentioned. Being across the Jordan, they seemed to think the war was not their concern.

Tragically and significantly, those who did not enter the land were the first ones to be taken into captivity. “In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel *from the Jordan eastward*: all the land of Gilead; *Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh*” (2 Kings 10:32, 33).

We should be warned against stopping short of God's best for us also. We must not be like the defectors of Israel who were satisfied to be still in the wilderness – just as long as they were out of Egypt.

Many, perhaps most, of the Corinthians had become 'dropouts.' They were saved, for Paul addressed them as "saints," but they had stopped short of enjoying the spiritual blessings Christ had purchased for them at Calvary. Not yielding their bodies as living sacrifices; failing to account themselves dead to sin but alive to God; neglecting to feed on His word that they might grow thereby – they were still babes when, considering the time they had been saved, they should have been full grown in the Lord. They had elected to remain east of their 'Jordan,' satisfied with the emotional high of speaking in tongues. They were content to contend with one another instead of contending for the faith. They were glorying in human leaders instead of glorying in the Lord. As a result the letters addressed to them, though containing a great deal of vital teaching, were heavily weighted with rebuke. They were not yet ready for the meat of the word. They had to be fed with milk (1 Cor. 3:1 – 4). They were saints – but how poverty stricken they were in the things of God! What a tragedy it is to be satisfied with salvation from hell and fail to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. May we not fail to cross our 'Jordan' – may we not become spiritual 'dropouts'!

God had given the entire land to Israel in the days of Abraham, but they had to 'possess their possessions' before they could claim them. "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you" was God's message to Joshua (Joshua 1:3). The two and a half tribes did not set foot on a single acre of land in Canaan – as a place where they intended to live. As a result the land that was intended for them was never their home. God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), but we, too, must possess our possessions. They are ours, but we must claim them by faith if we are to enjoy them. Let us not be content to settle down in complacency on the eastern side of our 'Jordan'!

Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh did not escape warfare by their decision not to enter the land. Not only did their armies cross the Jordan to fight along side their brethren, they also (to obtain homes for their families) engaged in a few skirmishes of their own before crossing the river (Num. 32:39 – 42). While their families were able to settle down to permanent homes before those of the other tribes, they were left, humanly speaking, defenseless while their men were fighting across the Jordan.

We must give the dropouts credit however – they did not take up residence east of the river until they had wangled permission from God to do so. Later they faithfully lived up to the bargain they had made, and sent their men across the Jordan to fight for the land. But, in a physical application of a spiritual principle, God "gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Psa. 106:15).

God does not always give us our request, for which we should be greatly thankful. Elijah prayed "that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, *take my life*, for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1 Kings 19:4). God said, "No!" Instead he has not died

to this day, and when he does it will be as a martyr instead of a religious suicide (Rev. 11:7). Paul prayed, "May this thorn in the flesh pass from me!" God said, "No," and Paul gloried in the answer. Christ Prayed, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done." The Father said, "No," and He (in His humanity) "learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Heb. 5:8, 9). We will be eternally thankful for that answer to His prayer! May we, too, pray "If it be possible" and "Not my will but Thine be done" – and *thank* Him for *unanswered* prayer if that is His response!

Their Itinerary in Retrospect (Numbers 33:1 - 49)

It is encouraging to realize that all the time Israel was wandering in the wilderness God knew where they were and cared enough to make a record of their travels. "Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD" (Num. 33:2). Even while they were in the wilderness as a chastening from the Lord He remained with them and supplied all their needs. "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing" (Deut. 2:7). "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9) – or "In all their affliction He was *not their adversary*" (NASB margin).

The name "Kadesh" does not appear in this itinerary until verse thirty-six – far too late to be a reference to the time of their rebellion. It seems that the events of chapters thirteen and fourteen took place at "Rithmath" (Num. 33:18). Rithmath is thought to be either the original name of Kadesh-barnea or a location near it, to which the encampment had moved while the spies were away.¹⁰

It seems that between Numbers fourteen and this record of their travels they had made nineteen changes of location, and ended up right where they began – at Kadesh-barnea! After spending many days in Kadesh (Deut. 1:46) the Lord said, "You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north" (Deut. 2:3 NASB). For nearly thirty-eight years they had been going around in circles and getting nowhere!

When they were back in Kadesh they were told to go north. However they did not continue northward for long. They were soon directed to turn eastward, to pass south of the Dead Sea, and then turn northward again to the banks of the Jordan, opposite Jericho.

Since they were at Kadesh when the time approached to enter the Promised Land, why didn't God direct them to invade it from the south, as they were told to do before, instead of from the east? Several possible reasons come to mind.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this see The Pulpit Commentary, volume two, page 427 of the section on the book of Numbers.

If they had approached the land directly from Kadesh, as they had attempted to do years before, memories of the devastating defeat they had suffered there could have haunted them and destroyed their morale.

No doubt the people in the land north of Kadesh had been expecting another attempted attack for years and would have erected extensive defenses against it. God directed His people around their 'Maginot Line' of defense and came at them from a direction they didn't expect - and would have had little time to specifically prepare for.

The Canaanites may have assumed that Israel would not attempt to enter their land where it seemed least vulnerable. Jericho was their strong point. It was probably the best-fortified city in Palestine, and the Jordan constituted a 'moat' for further protection. This daring approach across the Jordan was sound battle strategy however. If the Israelites had begun by winning the easier battles north of Kadesh they would still be fearful of the more severe ones ahead of them. When they began by soundly defeating the most formidable of their foes the rest would seem like 'a piece of cake.' As a matter of fact this strategy backfired when, having conquered Jericho, they became overconfident. They *did* think the small city of Ai would be a 'piece of cake' - and suffered a humiliating defeat as a result.

When the Jordan was crossed miraculously, and the walls of Jericho fell at the mere sound of marching feet and the blast of ram's horns, the morale of the rest of the defenders of the land must surely have been shattered.

As we admire the strategy used by God in the campaign against the Canaanites, we need to be aware that Satan often steals the techniques God employed and turns them against us. When we expect him to attack from one direction he often mounts a flanking action against us and strikes us where we least expect it - where we and have not built up defenses against him. Our best option by far is to do as the Israelites did - let God be our commander, for He knows how to defeat our foe (Joshua 5:14).

Possibly the most important, and surely the most interesting and instructive, reason for the attack from the east had to do with the symbolism and typology involved in crossing the Jordan. The deep significance of that crossing will be discussed in some detail later (and see the Appendix).

This retrospect of their sojourn signals the end of their wanderings. They are knocking at the door of Canaan and all that remains before the crossing of the Jordan are the last minute instructions by Moses, and his farewell to his people. What jubilation must have been theirs!

The Division of the Land for the Twelve Tribes (Numbers 33:50 - 34:29)

There has been a progression of emphasis in regard to the Land of Promise leading up to their arrival at the Jordan River. The early theme addressed was "**What** is the land to be like?" Their future homeland was repeatedly described as a land flowing

with milk and honey. “**When** will we enter the land?” is a topic that surfaces early in the promise to Abraham, and is modified by several delays along the way. The most significant and heart rending delay was the thirty-eight years added at Kadesh. At Kadesh there was also a complete revision of **who** would enter that land. A second census replaced the first one. When they arrived at the Jordan, at last, the problems incident to possessing the land held their attention. **How** is the land to be divided?

They must have given attention to this matter with all the enthusiasm and anticipation of children getting ready to open their presents on Christmas morning.

Before detailing the distribution of the land a solemn warning was issued. The land is theirs, but they must totally dispossess all of its occupants. Failure to do so will spell ruin for them in the future - they will find themselves, in turn, dispossessed. “The warning is here given for the first time, because the danger was now near at hand, and had indeed already shown itself in the matter of the Midianitish women.”¹¹ A discussion of the ruthless measures enjoined upon the Israelites to accomplish their take-over of the land will be reserved for the Conclusion of this book.

Two basic principles for the distribution of the land were given at the outset. The location of their inheritances in the land is to be decided by lot and, secondly, the size of the area allotted to them will depend on the size of the tribe (Num. 33:54).

“The LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt [the Nile] to the great river, the River Euphrates’” (Gen. 15:18). The nation has never yet possessed this entire region, and it will not all be theirs until Christ is their King. The borders of the Promised Land, as set before Joshua, do not encompass as large an area as was promised to Abraham, and they are carefully laid out in Numbers 34:1 – 15. It was to be bounded by the Great Sea (the Mediterranean Sea) on the west, and the Jordan River (rather than the Euphrates River) on the east. It extended from somewhat north of the Sea of Chinnereth (the Sea of Galilee), to a bit south of the Salt Sea (the Dead Sea), evidently at some point touching on the Brook of Egypt (the Nile River).

Cities for the Levites (Numbers 35:1 – 8)

The tribe of Levi has been considered as separate from the other tribes in several distinct ways.

Even though Levi was a son of Jacob (Israel) like the other eleven tribal leaders, when the tribes are listed the name of Levi is usually omitted. Giving Joseph two tribes brought the number of tribes listed up to twelve. Because of the way God had used Joseph to provide for his brothers, having forgiven them for their insidious rejection of him earlier, Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons prophetically. “Bless the lads; *let my name be named upon them-*” (Gen. 48:16). In fulfillment of this prophecy Manasseh and

¹¹ The Pulpit Commentary, volume two, page 474 of the section on Numbers.

Ephraim were looked upon as the sons of Jacob rather than as his grandsons. Each of them became a patriarch of one of the tribes of Israel.¹²

The basis for the special place given to Levi was the Passover. Since the blood of the Passover lambs had saved the lives of the firstborn sons of Israel God considered them His purchased possession. However, instead of claiming the firstborn of each family He took the whole tribe of Levi as their substitutes, and they became His.

The Levites were given a special ministry for God and enjoyed a special relationship to Him. Only a Levite, who was also a descendent of Aaron, could be a priest – and the rest of the tribe were set aside to serve the Lord by being the assistants of the priests.

Because the priests and Levites were to be scattered among the other tribes, so they could minister to them, no special section of the Holy Land was given to them. How then were they to live if they had no tribal home? This problem was solved by assigning them cities among the tribes. “Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities” (Num. 35:2). This provision is described in verses three to five.

If they were not to inherit any land, were the Levites to have no inheritance?

The Lord gave instructions as to the sons of Aaron, the priests. “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; [but] *I am your portion and your inheritance* among the children of Israel” (Num. 18:20). What a glorious inheritance that was! They could be content with such things as they had, for they had *Him*! Compare: “Be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5).

The rest of the Levites had an inheritance too, but it was not a portion of the land. “*The tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance*; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no [other] inheritance’” (Num. 18:24). “The LORD said to Aaron: ‘Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting’” (Num. 18:21).

But where will they live? As noted above, they were given cities – forty-eight of them (Num. 35:7). “The cities which you will give [to the Levites] shall be from the

¹² There is at least one instance where the list of tribes includes Levi. Levi will be one of the tribes making up the 144,000 witnesses during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:4 – 8. See v. 7). In this case the number of tribes is kept to twelve by omitting the tribe of Dan. While the Levites have no inheritance among the tribes, they will be associated with them as witnesses on this occasion. Dan lost that privilege – probably due to the fact that idolatry had been reintroduced into the tribes by them (Judges 18:30, 31).

possession of the children of Israel; from the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives" (Num. 35:8).

Refuge for the Manslayer (Numbers 35:9 – 34)

Of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites for their homes six of them were designated as "cities of refuge." These cities were scattered throughout the land so that one of them would be nearby, wherever a man might be located, when he had need of it. Three were to be on the western and three on the eastern side of the Jordan (Num. 35:14).

These cities were for the protection of those who had, unintentionally, taken the life of someone. They would be described today as those guilty of manslaughter. "These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there" (Num. 35:15). They were not available to murderers however. "But if [anyone] strikes [another] with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death" (Num. 35:16). What constitutes one a murderer is more fully defined in the following verses.

The cities of refuge may be considered a type of Christ only in a limited sense. Christ is indeed our refuge. "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Psa. 62:8). God is referred to as a refuge about fifteen times in the KJV of the Psalms. However there are many contrasts between the cities of refuge and Christ as our Refuge.

If the manslayer left the city of refuge before the death of the High Priest he was no longer protected. When we are in Christ we cannot flee from that refuge – it is forever. The city of refuge was protection from the hasty and unjustified judgment of men, only for certain deeds, and involved only protection for physical life. Our refuge is from righteous Judgment before the Judge of the Universe for all of our deeds – a Refuge He Himself has lovingly and graciously provided – and eternal life is at stake. The protection provided by the city of refuge was only until the death of the High Priest. Our High Priest will never die! "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). How our hearts should ring out with the words of the song "At Calvary" - written by William R. Newell!

Oh the love that drew salvation's plan!
 Oh the grace that brought it down to man!
 Oh the mighty gulf that God did span
 -- At Calvary!

Retention of the Tribal Distinctions (Numbers chapter thirty-six)

A short observation should suffice concerning this chapter. There must be no confusion concerning the inheritances of the tribes. The tribal boundaries could easily be obscured through intermarriages between them. This chapter recognizes that, and sets forth some ground rules to minimize it. It is an important consideration, for the tribal groupings are kept all through the history of Israel. They find a very prominent place to the very last. Their names are stipulated in the list of 144,000 witnesses (Rev. 7:4 – 8) and in the description of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). It is instructive to notice the number of times the number twelve, (the number characteristic of Israel) and multiples of it, occur in Rev. 21:12 – 21.

Surely God is not any less careful to maintain the *spiritual* distinctions set forth in Scripture. Paul admonishes us to “rightly divide” the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). How can we “approve the things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:10) if we cannot distinguish things that are different? Much of the muddled theology, past and present, stems from failure to distinguish between things that are different. Among other such things we need to distinguish between the kingdom program for Israel and the Age of Grace; between Israel and the Body of Christ; between law and grace; between standing and state; and between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God. May God grant us the will and ability to be diligent workers who do not need to be ashamed – rightly dividing the word of truth. Then may He also, by His Spirit, enable us to speak the truth in love! (Eph. 4:15). As we continue to search the Scriptures may we faithfully ***preach Jesus Christ*** – “according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25).

THE LONG WAY HOME – APPENDIX

In order to fully see the importance of the entrance into Canaan *by way of the Jordan River* it is necessary to reach ahead into the book of Joshua. It is there that we have the record of that event. The following study of Col. 2:10 – 12 draws together the Colossian passage, the record in Joshua, and the entrance into Canaan anticipated in the last few chapters of Numbers. Hopefully it will enable us to better understand and appreciate all three portions of His wonderful Word.

Commenting on Colossians 2:10 - 12, Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote as follows. “One of the apostle's threefold divisions of humanity is ‘the uncircumcision’ with reference to unregenerate Gentiles, ‘the circumcision in the flesh made by hands’ with reference to Israel, and ‘the circumcision made without hands’ with reference to Christians. ... The important truth that the believer has been circumcised without hands, and wholly apart from the flesh, is the grace position which is now in view.” He wrote earlier in the same volume, “The right understanding of this Scripture depends largely on recognizing that the reference to Christ's circumcision is a reference to His death.”¹

In these verses Paul is saying that Christians today need neither circumcision (the vital issue in his day) nor water baptism (the actively debated issue today) to make us complete -- for we already have the reality, in Christ, which these two rituals only shadowed. We are *complete in him*.

When Paul uses the expression “the flesh” he almost always has the sinful nature of the believer in view rather than his physical body. Yet the very word he uses (“flesh”) brings the physical body to mind. There is a reason for choosing this word. While the physical body is not, in itself, sinful, it is the channel through which most temptations come, and the members of the body are, all too often, “instruments of unrighteousness to sin” (Rom. 6:13).

With this in mind, the solution, as regards the sins of believers, is simple. *Death is the answer*. It is fully effective and permanent. The most law abiding and totally harmless people in the world are those lying calmly in the cemeteries! “He who has died has been freed from sin,” Paul writes in Rom. 6:7. It is noteworthy that in Romans chapters six through eight (where he is speaking of our sanctification) he uses the word “death,” or its equivalent, thirty-four times! God has no plan to reform, improve or control the flesh.. His plan for it is death. It has already been crucified at Calvary, but is rendered powerless in our lives only as we, by faith, account it dead.

In recognition of this, the rite of circumcision was introduced. Recognizing that the fleshly nature deserved death, a safely disposable part of the fleshly body was cut off to die as a token, bearing testimony to this truth. That the body itself, in spite of its complicity in sin, was not the real problem, is indicated when it is allowed to live on after circumcision. The real culprit, the sinful nature, is addressed in several passages in terms

¹ “Systematic Theology” by Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. III, pages, 250, 193 respectively.

of “circumcision.” “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut. 10:16). “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (Deut. 30:6). “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts” (Jer. 4:4). “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51). “He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:29).

Today we have no need of this circumcision made by hands, for we have the real and total circumcision, which was only faintly suggested in the ritual operation. This is made clear in Conybeare's translation of Col. 2:11. “In Him, also, you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hands, even the off-casting of the whole body of the flesh, the circumcision [cutting off at Calvary] of Christ.” His footnote on this verse reads, “The casting off, not (as in outward circumcision) of a part, but the whole body of the flesh, the whole carnal nature.” It is this circumcision which Paul has in mind when he says, “For we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put *no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil. 3:3 -- NASB).

We also have no need of ritual baptism, for we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Being members of His Body we share, retroactively, in His history. When He died, we died; when He was buried, we were buried; and when He arose from the dead, we rose with Him. It is not that, in a water ceremony, we are but *pictured* as dying and being raised from the dead (almost two centuries after Calvary), but that *when He died, we died and when He arose, we arose*.

I did not die *like* Him, but *with* Him. It is this death which constitutes my circumcision, the “off-casting of the whole body of the flesh” (Col. 2:11 - Conybeare), for “I *have been* crucified *with* Christ” (Gal. 2:20 - NASB). My “old self was crucified with Him” that my “body of sin might be done away with” that I might no longer be a slave to sin (Rom. 6:6 - NASB).

These truths find illustration in the book of Joshua.

When Israel entered the land, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they had to cross the Jordan River. Just, as in the crossing of the Red Sea, Israel had been baptized unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:1, 2), so, in crossing the Jordan, they were baptized unto Joshua -- and ‘Joshua’ is the Old Testament word for ‘Jesus.’ Going down into the Jordan speaks of death, while coming up out of it denotes resurrection. It is notable that the Ark of the Covenant – typical of Christ - went into the Jordan alone, except for the necessary priests to carry it. Then, while the Ark was in the Jordan, the people marched past it. Only when “All the people had crossed completely over the Jordan” (Josh. 3:17), and when “everything was *finished*” (Josh. 4:10),² was the Ark brought to dry land (Josh. 4:18). The people did not go down into that place of death *after* the Ark had

² Compare “when He had by Himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3) and “It is finished” (John 19:30).

completed the crossing, but *while it was reposing there*.

Two memorials were erected that day. Each of them consisted of twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and they represented the people who crossed the Jordan. Twelve stones were taken from the shore and set up in the midst of the river, where they remained when the waters returned (Joshua 4:9). They could look at that memorial, or recall it if the waters covered it, and say, “That is where the Ark was -- and I was there with it!”

Then twelve other stones were taken from the riverbed and erected on the Canaan shore. Looking upon these stones they could say, “The Ark was in the midst of the river, where these stones were, but it was brought up out of it -- and I came out with it.” In Gal. 2:20 (KJV) Paul voiced the realities pictured but dimly here when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ [the memorial in the river], nevertheless I live” (the memorial on the riverbank).

This crossing of the Jordan does not picture the believer dying physically and going to heaven – we won’t have to fight for our home in heaven as the Israelites did in Canaan!. Rather, it illustrates for us the glorious day when we finally despair of pleasing Christ in our Christian lives by a determined and legalistic exercise in “dead works” (Heb. 9:14). When we account ourselves dead unto sin but alive unto God (Rom. 6:11), we find our heavenly ‘Joshua’ a sufficient provision for our walk -- as we earlier (at our conversion) found Him the sufficient provision for our salvation.

It is important to see the link between the crossing of Jordan and the circumcising of the people. The stones taken out of the river were placed in, or near, Gilgal. It was named Gilgal (which means, “a rolling”) because there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away through the circumcision (Josh. 5:9). They had not practiced circumcision in the wilderness even though Moses had commanded it. Only after being baptized unto Joshua was it carried out. On the basis of their identification with the Ark in death and resurrection they began to practice that which symbolized death to the flesh (circumcision) -- and only then did they eat of the “old corn of the land” for which they had waited so long (Josh. 5:11, 12 -KJV).

There is also a link between the baptism of Col. 2:12 and the circumcision of Col. 2:11. This is made clear in Conybeare's translation. “In Him, also, you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, even the off-casting of the whole body of the flesh, the circumcision of Christ; *for* with Him you were buried in your baptism, wherein also you were made partakers of His resurrection, through the faith wrought in you by God, who raised Him from the dead.” The circumcision of verse eleven is without hands (not brought about by a priest's knife). So also the baptism of verse twelve is the working of God, not a ritual administered by a pastor or priest.

Just as the death and resurrection of Christ stands as the single basis for our *justification*, so our identification with Him in that death and resurrection is the solitary basis for our *sanctification*. All of the other elements in our daily walk of faith find their

source and reality in that work of Christ and our identification with Him in it. This is emphasized in the context of the Colossian passage under consideration. Notice “If you died with Christ-” (Col. 2:20 & following) and “If ... you were raised with Christ, -” (Col. 3:1 & following). The rest of Colossians is built firmly on these two considerations and their impact on our daily life.

Our completeness in Christ is not found in rituals, however important they were before they were replaced by the realities they shadowed, but by the realities themselves!