Micah - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

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THE journeyings of the children of Israel are very clearly divided into several stages, each having different lessons. The periods are:

1. From Egypt to Sinai, a journey of about three months (Ex. 19:1).— Here God brought out all that He was for the people on the ground of redemption, wholly apart from their behavior. The passover, the Red Sea, Marah, Elim, manna, water from the rock, and victory by intercession, are the stages of this wonderful journey. Before the question is ever raised of what God's people ought to be for Him God unfolds fully what He is for them on the ground of redemption. This is ever His way. In Nehemiah 9:15 and Psalm 78:15,16, 23-25, this part of the journey is expressly contrasted with the behavior of the people towards God, while Psalm 105:39-41 gives only this part of the journey, the record of grace, and leaves the other parts to be recalled in the following Psalm, the record of sin. Isaiah 48:21 also recalls the character of God seen in this part of the journey in remarkable contrast with the history of the people, Isaiah 48:17,18.

2. The Stay at Sinai, lasting almost a year (Num. 10:11).— Here the people take the ground of obedience as the condition of blessing, and break down at once. The intercession of Moses avails, God reveals His name and character, and the people are left to continue their journey on the ground of law and grace intermingled. In grace God goes with them, and the tabernacle is prepared, but He visits their transgression upon them. This stage and the references to it will be more fully traced out next month.

3. The Journey from Sinai to Kadeshbarnea, only occupying eleven days (Deut. 1:2,19).— Its record is found in Numbers 11, 12, 13:1. The people were no better and no worse than before, but now on the ground of law their utter failure comes out, and judgment from God. First, there is lust and the manna despised; then Moses is despised and Miriam shut out of the camp as a leper. What ministry or communication of the mind of God can there be when Christ is despised?

4. The Stay at Kadesh-barnea, occupying "many days" (Deut. 1:19,46). Here the final breakdown occurs, "they despised the pleasant land"; man under the law cannot enter into the blessing, but grace is found in Joshua, whose name is the witness to God's resource of grace (Num. 13:16), and in Caleb; the little ones are to enter in. Grace, too, is found in the priestly intercession of Aaron as chosen by God (Num. 16:48, and 17).

5. The Journey from Kadesh-barnea to the torrent Zered, occupying thirty eight years (Deut. 2:14).— This was the time of Jehovah's "estrangement" (Num. 14:34), a solemn time; we find its echo in Psalms 90:7-12. The reality of that government declared at Sinai must come out, even if grace be there; the ark was with them through it all, but Miriam and Aaron die.

6. The Stay in the Plains of Moab.— Here the righteousness of Jehovah is declared (Mic. 6:5). Grace does not frustrate government, but God will make good what He had revealed Himself to be at the beginning. The people are as bad as ever, but God does not change, and Satan's attempt to keep them out of the land by appealing to God's character had already been met by the blood in Egypt. God had seen the blood, and He could see no iniquity in Jacob.

This period is the time covered by Deuteronomy, the retracing by Moses of the whole history.

7. Jordan closes the wilderness history. The twelve rebellious tribes are left in the bed of Jordan in figure, and the twelve new ones come up, brought in by Joshua himself, to commence a fresh history in the land of promise.

These stages and their meaning, and the references to them in the Word of God, will be taken up in our study in order, but they are given briefly in outline to suggest further study, and to show the bearing of the different parts of the wilderness journey. The meanings of the stages of the journey from the Red Sea to Sinai are simple:

1. The Passover.— Redemption by blood, righteousness, God's starting-point.

2. The Red Sea, redemption by power—salvation.

3. Marah, practical exercise of soul and the experience of death bring bitterness, but the cross reveals God's way of blessing, and makes the bitter sweet, then obedience is health to the soul.

4. Elim, a picture of full blessing resulting from redemption, when wilderness experiences are past (cf. Isaiah 11 and 12).— The joy of salvation is known in peace under Christ's blessed government—really a millennial picture. These first four seem complete, and then follow the resources of grace for the wilderness, already well known to all students, but God give us to learn their value practically, Christ humbled, the Spirit given, and the intercession of Christ on high while the Spirit leads here below to victory.

The following weighty words from a well-known servant of Christ have a message not to be neglected:

"I say to you with all solemnity and all carefulness and earnestness, if you will find me man or woman or little child who neglects the study of the Word of God, I will show you arrest of spiritual development. Nothing can take its place. You can no more develop Christian character by service without study of the Word and prayer than you can make the thundering locomotive run along the track unless you feed its fires. You cannot live by work in the physical realm unless you have proper food and air. This—hear me now, and God help me to say it kindly, even though it be a word of criticism—has been the crying failure of the Christian Church. Christian men and women in this age of busy fussiness have been, and still are, attempting to develop Christian growth by the things they do, while they neglect the culture of the life in the study of, and answer of the will to the Word of God. Dear young Christian, let me put the thing simply. I beseech you to be a student of the Word."

We can surely say from our hearts “Amen,” and the more so as we recall a voice—the voice that has paramount authority over us—the voice of the blessed Lord and Master, saying, “If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be My disciples.”

The subject for November will be the detailed study of Exodus 34. Will all students try to send in a complete list of all the passages in which Exodus 34:6,7 is either quoted or referred to? It is the great around text of the Old Testament.

B. S. ED.

What Is the Difference Between Propitiation and Substitution?

These are two great aspects of Christ’s atoning work, illustrated by the two goats in Leviticus 16.

1. Propitiation Godward—seen in the goat that was slain, whose blood was carried within the veil, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat. This is a type of the value of the blood of Christ in God’s sight, as meeting all His just and holy claims, so that He can righteously receive and pardon any and every sinner who comes to Him pleading the value of Christ’s precious blood.

2. Substitution manward—seen in the live goat, upon whose head the sins of the people were confessed, illustrating faith laying its hand on Christ, and thus appropriating to itself the value of His sacrifice.

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