Numbers - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Apologetic 1, Death of Aaron

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As regards the difficulty arising from the passage in Deuteronomy1 regarding Aaron's death, it is one of those passages which are the strongest possible proofs of not only the authenticity but the personal knowledge of the author, because there is apparent contradiction, which is immediately solved when you examine all the details-a proof that it is written by one who knew them, and, having the consciousness of the links which united the parts, was not sensible of the necessity of making it hang together as a fabricated story.

It is quite true that, in appearance, Deut. 10 makes Aaron die before reaching Meribah-kadesh, where, according to Numbers, he sinned and incurred the penalty of death. Mr. N.'s proof is Num. 33:31-38. Moseroth being mentioned in verse 31 before Kadesh, where Moses sinned; Mosera, in Deuteronomy 10 as the place of Aaron's death, which would be thus before coming to Meribah, where he sinned; for in Deut. 10 it is said he died at Mosera, consequently at Moseroth (Numbers 33: 31); but in this list of Numbers this Moseroth is before he came to Kadesh-barnea, where the sin was committed for which he was condemned to die in the wilderness. In one word, Mosera, where he died, Deuteronomy 10, is in Num. 33:31 before Kadesh, where he sinned.

Now, if we look at these accounts superficially (Mr. N. must forgive me if I employ the word he has consecrated to this use), this objection may seem plausible enough. But it is perfectly certain that Israel went from Moseroth to Ezion-gaber, back to Moseroth, and again back to Ezion-gaber, then to go round Edom. This circumstance, which clears up the whole matter, shows that the knowledge of the facts was of that personal kind which is not aware of the difficulty of one who is a stranger to them, because personal consciousness of the whole is a continual explanation of them. If the reader pays attention, the first two places mentioned in Deuteronomy are in inverse order to that in which they are named in Num. 1 may first remark that they continued in this neighborhood thirty-seven years; so that many journeys might have been made; but there is something more precise than that. In Num. 33 they go from Moseroth by Bene-jaakan, Hor-hagidgad, to Ezion-gaber. From Ezion-gaber they go back to Hor. (Num. 21.) After Aaron's death they go from Mount Hor back to the Red Sea—that is, to Ezion-gaber—to compass the land of Edom, and go up the other side of the mountain district. That is, we have one journey from Moseroth to Ezion-gaber, another back to Mount Hor, where Aaron died; and, as Num. 21 shows, a journey from Mount Hor back to Ezion-gaber. At the end of the second of these journeys Aaron dies; that is, when they had gone back to Mount Hor.

That the last journey from Mount Hor to Ezion-gaber was after the death of Aaron is certain from Num. 21, because we have the attack of Arad the Canaanite there, and also in Num. 33:40. So that after the last verse we have a journey from Mount Hor to the Red Sea (as in chap. 21); but in chapter 33 we had one already from Moseroth to Ezion-gaber through a district called Hor-hagidgad. Hence they must have gone back from Eziongaber to the place Aaron died at, still on the west side of Edom; for it is only on the last journey they turned round to go up on the east side.

The first journey from Moseroth to Ezion-gaber was by Benejaakan or "the sons of Jaakan," Hor-hagidgad, and Jotbathah. The second journey was back from Ezion-gaber to the place where Aaron died. Now the journey in Deuteronomy is from the wells of the children of Jaakan to Mosera (that is, part of a journey back along the road they had come, at the end of which, in Mosera, Aaron dies); exactly as, in Numbers, we have seen them go back from Ezion-gaber to Hor where Aaron died, and thence set out again for Ezion-gaber.

But this is not all. We have in Deuteronomy some stations after Aaron's death in Mosera, whither they had returned from Ezion-gaber, as in Numbers we have seen they did. They go thence to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah (that is, the road back again to Ezion-gaber, which is exactly the route spoken of in Num. 21 and 33). In a word, Numbers gives us a journey from Moseroth to Ezion-gaber-one back to Hor-and thence back to Ezion-gaber, or the Red Sea, finally to leave the district. At the end of the one back to Hor Aaron dies.2

Deuteronomy gives us the last two stations on the second journey, or the one back. Then Aaron dies; and then, after his death, we have two stations on the road, which, from Num. 33:32, 33, we know was the road back to Ezion-gaber-exactly the one we know, from Num. 21:4, the Israelites took on leaving Mount Hor. That is, there is the most perfect exactitude in the account; yet so given as to show it must have flowed from personal acquaintance with facts, or it never could have come out in the order it does. Deut. 10 gives us demonstrably the end of the second journey (i.e., the one back from Ezion-gaber, and the beginning of the third-Aaron dying at the end of the second, exactly as in Numbers). The only additional circumstance in Numbers is, that Aaron went up Mount Hor to die. Deuteronomy names only the station, which must, by the order of the journey, have been in the district of the Hor range. All the details confirm this order of march.

Thus, instead of being incompatible, they are the fullest confirmation that nobody could have written these accounts but one personally acquainted with the facts. I may add that their passage by Kadesh is omitted in Deuteronomy; but this is no way surprising, as it only gives us the last two stations-Bene-jaakan and Moseroth.

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Apologetic 1, Fragments of Poetry

As regards Num. 211 one of the alleged fragments of poetry is a song of Israel at the well. Nothing very extraordinary historically: a very interesting figure of the refreshing springs found when the wilderness is passed and Jordan approached. The other two are perfectly apposite and important. They are well known records, cited to prove that the country in question was in the hands of the Amorites, and not of Moab, when Israel took possession. This was of the utmost importance, because Israel was forbidden to touch Moab, whereas the country of the Amorites was given up to them. Now Israel's statements, of whatever authority for themselves, would have been no record against their

enemies. Hence, to maintain the title of Israel to these lands, well known popular memorials of the previous conquest of Moab by the Amorites, and the acquisition of this territory by the latter, are given, and of the border as it then was. And this is so truly the case, that the children of Ammon claimed precisely this territory in the time of Jephthah (Judg. 9), and Jephthah goes over all this very ground as that which justified Israel in maintaining possession of the country. It was not Ammon's nor Moab's either. Nor did Balak, king of Moab, pretend to it then. The Amorites, he says, were in possession, and Israel dispossessed them. The common records of the country preserved in their popular songs, and the well known account of the books of the wars of the Lord, were the important point here, and these are preserved in Numbers.

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Critical 1, Third and Seventh Days, The

Num. 19

Of the use of the third day and the seventh day in Num. 19:12, I should not give any very dogmatically certain interpretation, drawing its meaning more from the experiences pointed to by the figure than from directly scriptural proofs. " Third" is little used in scripture as a number to which meaning is attached; it is, however, somewhat as that which is beyond two. Two seems to import completeness by corroboration in witness; the third more than enough, and hence, also, what leaves the previous state whose witness is complete. It is here used, I believe, only as a division of seven.

But the moral bearing I apprehend is this. The red heifer was a provision for defilement in the way-hence introduced into the Book of Numbers, not in Leviticus. Its use was not to found communion by blood (though that groundwork was first laid and perfectly laid, in that the blood was sprinkled seven times there where Jehovah was to meet the people), but to restore communion interrupted by defilement. The sign (the ashes) of sin having been consumed long ago, was put into running water, and the unclean sprinkled with it the third day. For two days he lay under the uncleanness-must feel it as such. There was no haste in restoration to communion till the privation of it, and thus the uncleanness of sin, was felt. Then in the water (the application by the word in the power of the Holy Ghost), the sense that the sin which interrupted communion was put away before God was given, after the full witness in the soul of the evil. The man was brought out of it in the sense of the grace that put it away, and that cleansed from it; and connected the sense of sin, not with the bitterness of lost communion, but with the grace that had put it away: giving a deeper and more justifying sense of it in connection with grace, making us judge it with God in grace; not in the sense of being, as to enjoyment, without Him, and the Holy Ghost a reprover. Still this is not communion; it is not the soul occupied with God without the conscience having to be exercised, but the conscience in exercise, though now no longer a bad one, but in a renewed sense of grace and goodness. Judging the evil thence, one is in a sense purified, but not so as to be peacefully in communion with God; enjoying Christ for His own precious excellences, which we do in communion. When the full work is wrought; when this purifying is complete, and grace in respect of sin is fully entered into, then communion is entered into, which leaves sin and all thoughts about it behind. The grace that has purified in making us judge sin according to grace makes us now enjoy grace without any more thinking of sin-in a word, enjoy God. Communion is restored, and in the full acceptableness of the offering of Christ understood and enjoyed. I enter into the presence of, and communion with, God-sin, as the subject of my thoughts, being wholly left behind. This is the seventh day. All is complete.

Bible Treasury: Volume 13, Guidance of Grace, The

We have here the blessing of the Lord which precedes always our miseries and our complaints. God ever begins with grace. He promised redemption after the fall before it was a question of repentance of sins. We have also here the history of our privileges. The people were guided by the Lord. We are led by grace. From the moment that God owned a people, He abides in their midst. God abides in the church by the Holy Spirit. The sin of the church is to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit, to extinguish the free action of the gifts. The Israelites were to be guided of the Lord, as we should be; they are the picture of what we are. All that happened to them as recorded in scripture was written as types.

The two privileges of the church of God are to have the purpose and will of God written in the word, and the Holy Spirit to make us understand it.

Redemption places us in the wilderness with God. It is the presence of God Himself that conducts us. The presence of God must be owned if we would be strong and courageous in crossing the wilderness. “On the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony.” The presence of God is attached to His law. “At even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire until the morning. In the darkness and difficulties the presence of God is even more manifest and visible.” So it was always; the cloud covered it [by day], and the appearance of fire by night. When the cloud rose, Israel journeyed; where it abode, there they encamped. “At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord, by the hand of Moses.” (Chap. 9:18-23.) They marched or encamped at the Lord's will. Nothing simpler or more beautiful than the manner in which Israel if faithful attended each moment to the will of God.

That which does us most harm is our attending to our own will, even doing the things of God according to our own will. Israel knew not whither they were going, but they marched without question or hesitation, following the movement of the cloud. Circumstances make no difference to the child of God: he does the will of God in all circumstances, he has no other rule than God's will. How could they find the way night or day in the wilderness without a way? Circumstances were nothing. It was needful to attend to the Lord.

Philip was extremely blessed at Samaria; but in the midst of all that the Spirit says to him, Arise, and go southward on the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza (which is desert). And he arose and went. God had a sheep there. He obeys, and when the work is done, he is found at Azotus, preaching the gospel to all the cities till he came to Caesarea. His obedience is a fine example of the guidance of a child of God. To obey is more important than all the rest. Christ comes to do the will of Him that sent Him. When it is necessary to act, He does act. He says, If one walketh in the light, he stumbleth not. To rise, to rest, all this ought to be done according to God's will. In Matt. 11:25, 26, Jesus gives His Father thanks, because it was His good pleasure to hide the things of God, from the wise and prudent, while revealing them unto babes. He adds, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Take My yoke upon you: submit entirely to the will of God. The child of God ought to have unswerving confidence in God, and to obey Him completely.

In the midst of the night the fiery pillar moves; God says, Go. They go without knowing whither, but knowing it is God who guides them. It is no question then of taking account either of time or of circumstances; God gives the word.

In John 10:7-9 Jesus says, I am the door of the sheep. When He has put forth all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, because they know His voice. It is our privilege to be guided at each moment by God. But it is necessary to pay heed to the Lord: if not the cloud might rise, and no one perceive it. It is thus in paying heed that one goes onward when the cloud lifts; it must be done in the details of each day. If the aged Simeon, guided by the Holy Spirit, had not come into the temple, he would not have had the privilege of meeting with the child Jesus there. The least circumstance may have serious results, and we are the purchased of the Lord without anything to do if it be not to pay heed to the Lord and to march when He leads the way.

The silver trumpets were the testimony of God. (Chap. 10:1-10) To own openly, frankly, the truth of the Lord concerns us much, because the Lord puts Himself forward to render testimony to His truth. Here the main object was to gather the people of God around Him, or to make them journey, though other purposes were served, as for the chiefs to gather and for alarm in war, besides for joy over the sacrifices. But the alarm in war was to remind them of God's intervention. Let us sound the testimony without fear. He will not fail to appear.

For the march the prescribed order is modified (vers. 11-28) from chapter 3:27, when we come to fact. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun went first; then the tabernacle was borne by the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari; then came these other tribes, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad; then the sanctuary with the Kohathites; after them Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, and Dan, Asher, Naphtali in due place.

Moses besought his father-in-law to be for Israel instead of eyes (vers. 29-32); but here again grace acts extraordinarily. (Ver. 33) The ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey to search out a resting-place for them. God knows very well that even in the desert we need rest before Him.

See what God's faithfulness does for us. When Israel had to cross the Jordan, the ark of the covenant goes before them and is set in the midst of the river, which is clean dried up. Yet did it then overflow its banks, as it was the time of harvest. There it stays till every Israelite had crossed. The passage is an image of our death and resurrection with Christ. God accommodates Himself, not to sin, but to the effects of sin. When Israel failed in faithfulness and was affrighted by the Canaanite, He turns them away from Canaan, but the cloud turns away also. The most faithful souls must suffer from the state of the whole church. (So the faith of Elijah was extraordinary; but he could not go to Jerusalem.) Caleb and Joshua must for thirty-eight years accompany Israel in the desert and undergo the exterior consequences of sin. We must in the wilderness not follow sin, but undergo the painful consequences of the state of the church. But we can count on the cloud, on the faithfulness of God. When the Holy Spirit has been grieved, He cannot sanction the evil, but He does not fail in His faithfulness toward us. Jesus was isolated; He passed through the wilderness Himself. He understands and feels the state of the people of God and prepares them in the wilderness places of rest.

We can always count in the wilderness on the goodness of God. We cannot see then on the road. Moses wished to find a guide in Hobab: this was to forget the guidance of the cloud. There, is no way in the wilderness; but God is there. It is because we do not discern the cloud when all is easy, that we do not see it when all is difficult. After sin what is not more difficult. Two things give us confidence-the written word, and the Holy Spirit. For human reason cannot sound the word; without the Spirit it comes to nothing. The Holy Spirit guides us by the word. The two things are necessary: neither the word only without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without the word. The Holy Spirit is needed to have the desire to understand the word, as well as the strength to walk and obey. We need God and the word of His grace. And we have God to instruct and conduct, us. The child of God may, when he is attentive to it, discern clearly the direction of the Holy Spirit. One cannot be guided of the Spirit when one does that which is contrary to the word; we can, if we can make it say like Moses in verse 35, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered.

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Apologetic 1, Water - Aaron's Rod - the Rock - Meribah, The

Take again the water.1 If the reader reads from Numbers 10, he will see grace condescending to lead them; the ark, which by right ought to have been in the middle of the host, goes before for three days' journey, to seek a place for them to rest in-as Jesus goes before His own sheep. This was grace. The Lord serves them as guide, above and beyond the legal relationship. From Num. 11 onwards we see Israel's rebellion, and the working of the flesh developed in its different forms: Taberah-Kibroth Hattaavah—Miriam and Aaron despising Moses—despising the pleasant land after sending the spies-the open rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, against Aaron and Moses, priest and king in Jeshurun. How are the people to be led through? Destruction may be just, but cannot lead us to the end of our journey. Here then is given a sign of the principle. Aaron's (that is, the priest's rod) is to guide and govern them, and that not in judgment, as the use of Moses' had been, but in life-giving resurrection power-the dry stick blossoms and bears fruit-the sign of priesthood with divine power of life. Grace in this way can alone lead us through-Moses' rod of law and judgment cannot. With this, consequently, is given what might seem otherwise out of place-the means of cleansing unintentional defilements unwittingly incurred (Num. 19, the red heifer), the connection of which with our subject is evident. Murmurs come in again for water, and Moses is told to take the rod and speak to the rock, and it should "give forth his water." There is no need to smite it with the rod of judgment now. But Moses does not rise to the height of divine grace, but, occupied with himself, talks of himself and Aaron, and smites the rock with his rod instead of glorifying God. God rises above the unbelief even of Moses, and gives the water, glorifying Himself; but shows that on the legal principle it is impossible to reach the land. Moses is shut out of it. The first time the rock had to be smitten ("and that rock was Christ") to have the spiritual stream to drink of; but afterward it was not so: it was only to

be spoken to, and it would give its water. That is, under the grace of priesthood, which we need not for redemption, which is already accomplished, but for the weakness of the wilderness, it has only to be asked for and obtained. Thus we have sovereign grace giving freely and gratuitously; then legal condition, and failure and judgment; then priestly care and living grace affording, in spite of failure, the needed supply as the means of carrying the people through the wilderness to the promised land, after every form of the unbelief of the heart had been brought out. I may add, to complete the instruction, that quite at the close the question arises, Can these failing ones enter? The full justifying grace, and blessing too, is brought out, and in presence of the enemy it is declared as the full answer, "He bath not seen iniquity in Jacob, nor beheld perverseness in Israel."

Am I going out of scriptural principles to indulge my own fancy in these things? No; "they happened unto them for ensamples (types-forms of truth), and are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come." And in these admirably instructive accounts, whose doubling gives them their peculiar character and force, infidelity sees, that is, imagines, two documents. And what more? Nothing? Yes, UNDENIABLE2 error. There may have been fifty documents, for aught I know; only, if there were, God has marvelously used the contents for our instruction. Meribah means "strife," and the two cases of striving were called strife.3 That is very surprising. As to a second appointment of elders,4 I may have easily, it is true, forgotten something; but I know of none. There were rulers of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands probably, appointed by the advice of Jethro; but that is quite another thing.

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