Numbers - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

Words of Truth: Volume 5, Numbers 9:15-23

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands

Where the foot of a saint hath trod;

No marks have they left who are passed on before,

Save the word of a faithful God.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save the steps of the Son of God.

My eye must be upwards—afar from the world,

In this desert I find no cheer;

The footsteps of Jesus are under the cloud,

Yet my eye must be fixed up there.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save the steps of the Son of God.

Oh, be it “two days, or a month, or a year,”

That the cloud may remain above,

I cannot make haste, for it bids me be still,

And I know that it rests in love.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save the steps of the Son of God,

How oft would my zeal, with its fleshy desires

Be at work, when He bids me wait;

My will must be broken—my temper subdued,

While I sit at the Master’s feet.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save the steps of the Son of God.

And there did I rest as my eye looked below,

All in silence the cloud might move

My Lord would pass on, and my heart would be sad,

And His power should I fail to prove.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save the steps of the Son of God.

Where’er it may go— tho’ the way may be long,

The’ the flesh and the world oppose,

On, onwards I follow—my strength is the Lord,

And He’s mine till my march shall close.

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands,

Save this steps of the Son of God.

Yes, mine on the journey, and mine as I rest,

He is mine in each joy or woe,

His manna shall feed me with food by the way,

And His water in fullness flow,

There is not a trace on the wilderness sands.

Save the steps of the Son of God,

S.O. M.G.O.

Words of Truth: Volume 6, The Kohathites

Walk and service are the characteristic features of the Book of Numbers; access and worship those of the Book of Leviticus. In the former the instructions are given “in the wilderness” (c. i. 1). In the latter “out of the tabernacle of the congregation” (c. 1. 1). The place is suited to the’ subject. Again, in Leviticus the Priests are especially in prominence; in Numbers the Levites take the lead.

Of these, the family of Kohath come first in order; but before drawing attention to their special line of service, it may be well to notice the peculiar place given to the family of Levi amongst the children of Israel.

When the other tribes were numbered they were omitted, but appointed “over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it they shall bear the tabernacle and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle” (c. 1:50). And again— “Bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they shall be wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.” And again— “I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the first-born that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the first-born are mine; for on the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the first-born in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the Lord” (c. 3:6-13).

Thus the Levites had certain things in common with the children of Israel their brethren, and certain peculiar and especial privileges entrusted to them. With the children of Israel they had been redeemed by blood and by power—the blood of the paschal lamb had sheltered them—the “crystal walls” of the Red Sea had been their safeguard; but distinct from them they are especially the Lord’s, being taken instead of the first-born of Israel whom He had spared, and unlike them also they are wholly given to Aaron, the High Priest, to minister to him, and to exercise their service in dependence on him. In the accomplishment of their service they were nearest to the tabernacle, and the tabernacle and its contents were their peculiar charge. Are there not even now amongst the Lord’s people, all of whom have part in the death and resurrection of Jesus, those whom God has especially selected for Himself to be near Him, to be “wholly given” to Christ, and to exercise their service in dependence on Him alone!

To return to the family of Kohath: “Their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof” (c. 31). And again, “take the sum of the sons of Kohath... from thirty years old and upward, even until fifty years old;... this shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation about the most holy things” (c. 4:2, 3, 4). The Gershonites had the charge of the tent with its coverings and the hangings for the doors. To the Merarites were entrusted the boards, the bars, the pillars, and the sockets; the one bearing the framework, the other the covering of it; but to the sons of Kohath alone was it given to carry. “the most holy things” all the inner furniture of the tabernacle. And thus their trust, in all its beautiful detail, is mentioned first as of first importance. And we may here remark that when the princes make their offering in c. 7, whereas two wagons and their oxen are given to the sons of Gershon, and four wagons and their oxen are assigned to the sons of Merari, none at all are allotted to the Kohathites, “Because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that that they should bear upon their shoulders” (v. 9). Too precious were “the most holy things” to be exposed to the rude shaking of the wagons. The gentle, steady shoulders of the sons of Kohath, from thirty to fifty years old, men of maturity, must bear them with all the delicacy of which they were masters. (See 1 Chron. 13.-15:2).

May we not say that even now, not only amongst the people of God, the whole company of the redeemed, but also amongst those whom He has drawn apart in special nearness to Himself, there is an inner circle to whom the Kohathite service has been entrusted—those of decision, those of maturity, those to whom the Lord can commit that which most concerns Himself—the glory of the person of His Son? Not that the sons of Gershon and Merari have not posts of honor too, and work that required activity and intelligence, as the one set up the framework and the other covered it over; but to the Kohathites alone belonged, as we have seen this inner line of service, the charge of these “most holy things.”

“And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it, and shall put thereon the covering of badgers’ skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof” (c. iv. 5, 6).

It was on the journey that their services came into requisition, for we know from c. ix. 17, it was “When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.” And Aaron was the one at whose hands they received their charge. He took down the vail, he covered the ark therewith, be laid over it

the badger's skins and cloth wholly of blue, and he put in the staves thereof. It remained for them to carry through the wilderness what he entrusted to them. The same order is observable with the table, the candlestick, and all the other objects of their charge. This has all its precious and peculiar signification. God's saints are on the journey now, laboring to enter into His rest the "rest that remaineth" (Heb. 4:11). Jesus guides them in their pathway (Psa. 32:8); and as they travel on, He who is their High Priest above commits to them what He would have them carry for Him through the wilderness. What this burden is, this precious Scripture tells us.

The Ark comes first in order, made, as we know from Ex. 25:10-22, of shittim wood and gold, and covered over with the mercy seat and cherubims of glory. Here Jehovah dwelt: as He says Himself, "There I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee" (v. 22)—a fitting type of the One in whom God should yet draw nigh to man, and through whom He should reveal Himself (John 1:14.-18). Jesus the Son of God is here before us, God manifest in the flesh; and thus the vail is next referred to as the covering that immediately enveloped the Ark. Of its materials Ex. 26:31, informs us, and Heb. 10:20, as to its signification. The human form of Jesus is by this unfolded in all its varied beauty—heavenly origin, kingly position, human glory, personal righteousness, and the One to whom all judgment has been committed—being depicted by the blue, the purple, the scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work, with cherubims. Next to this the badger's skin is placed; and knowing, as we do, how often animals in Scripture are used to represent character (Matt. 10:16), we have no difficulty in seeing that the Spirit of God would bring before us here the watchfulness of Him who, by the word of Jehovah's lips, ever kept Himself from the paths of the destroyer (Psa. 17:4). Although the Son of God in all the fullness of His glory, He was not unmindful that the prince of this world stalked abroad, and therefore was always on the watch to baffle his designs. But overall we find "a cloth wholly of blue," and sweetly are we here reminded that although the utmost vigilance was necessary in the presence of the evil one, yet before the Father He was ever "the Son of Man which is in Heaven" (John 3:13), the celestial color evidencing this more eloquently than words.

But this was not the only trust of the sons of Kohath. "And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes and the spoons and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon: and they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof" (vv. 6, 7). The structure of this table we learn from Ex. 25:23-30; its freight from Lev. 24:5.9. Formed of gold and shittim wood, before the Lord it ever bore the memorial of the chosen nation in all its primal order. They might fail and did, until "the name of God was blasphemed among the gentiles through them;" but still the twelve cakes of two tenth deals remained, with pure frankincense, before the Lord, the special portion, too, of Aaron and his sons.

What that table did for Israel, Jesus does on high for us and humbling as it is to contrast the so-called Church of the present day with that set up on earth at Pentecost, still we can rejoice to think that the Son of God ever maintains before His Father a memorial of that "one pearl of great price" for which He stripped Himself of His Messianic glory. Twelve was the symbolic number for Israel; "one loaf" expresses the unity of the Church of God (1 Cor. 10:17). The heavenly covering enshrouds the table, fitly pointing to His personal glory; on this was placed the "continual bread," with its accompanying utensils, and then the scarlet covering, to tell of glory in connection with man (2 Sam. 1:24), the people of His choice, and over all the badgers' skins, as suited to the character of him who knew so well the craft of Satan and the way to meet it (Luke 4:1-13). The exceeding fitness of the cloth of blue between the table and its freight cannot fail to strike the reader, as well as the difference of the order of the coverings When the ark was in question; the special place occupied by the ark as the throne of God will at once account for the difference.

The Candlestick comes next. "And they shall take a cloth of blue and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps and his tongs and his snuff-dishes, and all the oil-vessels thereof wherewith they minister, unto it; and they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar." Of the form of this we read in Ex. 25:31-40, of its use in Lev. 24:2-4. Of purest gold, and with branches perfect as to their number, from evening unto morning did Aaron order the light of it before the Lord continually—as if to tell us that from the evening of this world's darkness to the morning of the day of. glory, a Priest after another order sustains in His own person a light for His people, the espoused ones of His choice, in the presence of His Father's throne above. The Son of God, then, the light of His people, is before us, and the clothing is of blue and badger's skin to spew that, heavenly to God and to faith, to than and to Satan He is vigilant and wary.

"And upon the golden altar" they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof." As to the construction of this and its special use, Ex. 30:1-10 gives us ample information. Formed of gold and shittim wood, it stood before the wail, and morning and evening it sent up its cloud of incense in the presence of the Lord, attended to by the same one that dressed the lamps of the golden candlestick—a beautiful and simple figure (see Rev. 8:3-4) of Him who, lifting up His hands like the evening sacrifice (Psa. 141:2), "ever liveth to make intercession for us." The Lord Jesus is depicted to us here, and still heavenliness within and watchfulness without characterize Him.

"And they shall take all the instruments of ministry wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar." What these "instruments of ministry" were the Holy Ghost has not been pleased to particularize, but we, have sufficient before us to lead our thoughts to Him who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister." As the eternal Word, His ear was opened ere He left the glory to do the will of God (Psa. 40:6-8). As Man He took a servant's form (Phil. 2:7). As a Servant, He spoke of Him who, wakeneth morning by morning, who wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 1. 4). And when His time of earthly service was completed "they seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). Like the slave of Ex. 21:5,6, He becomes our servant forever. He serves us now, according to John 13 He will serve us, according to Luke 12:37: The instruments of ministry give us then the thought of the Son of God in His servant character; and, again, the glory of the heavens and vigilance for earth in figure envelopes Him.

"And they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth thereon, and they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the flesh-hooks, and the shovels and the basins, all the vessels of the altar, and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it." The description of this we find in Ex. 27:1-8, the use of it the following chapter, vv. 38-43, with other passages, teaches us, Morning and evening throughout the year did the sweet savor of the lambs of the first year ascend before the Lord, a continual burnt offering—so evidently designating the lasting character of the sacrifice of the "Lamb without blemish and without spot," "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The Son of God, God's Lamb, is here before us, and enshrouding that which points Him out to us a purple covering—as if to say that at the moment when He was most contemptible in the eyes of man, before God and to faith He shone out in all the brightness of His kingly glory. Well chosen, though done in unbelief, was the inscription of Pilate; blessed was the testimony of the dying thief— "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." The offering, and yet the

King is set before our gaze, but covered over to the eyes of man with that which tells of how, while rejoicing, he knew how to beware (Phil. 3:1,2).

Such was “the burden of the sons of Kohath,” and we can well conceive with what solemn care they received their charge at the hands of Aaron, and the honor they felt was conferred upon them in their being allowed to act for him in the charge of the most holy of all the holy things. And what a strange sight must it have been, and one so incomprehensible, save to all that were in the secret, to behold this company of men, bearing through the wilderness what was so glorious within but so repulsive without, and yet withal of such deep significance.

May it be ours to seek to qualify ourselves for this Kohathite service. The mere fact that we are saved is not sufficient, for all Israel was redeemed, as we have seen; neither is it enough to be wholly the Lord’s, for the Gershonites and Merarites, as we have noticed, were this. Those only are represented by the Kohathites who “set the Lord always before” them, whose appreciation of the Lord in all His varied excellence is such that they desire none else but Him their hearts are satisfied with Him. He is the one delight of their souls. Their one thought is to please Him until they are with Him where He is, beholding His glory, and precisely as their joy in Him increases their representation of Him here will be manifest to all.

D. T. G.

Words of Truth: Volume 3, Ribband of Blue, The

Among the distinguishing marks by which the children of Israel were to be known from the rest of mankind, perhaps none were more significant personally than “the ribband of blue” upon the fringes of the borders of their garments. Nor are we left to conjecture its import and value, either to the eye of Him who commanded it, or to the thoughts of those who wore it for, in truth, Jehovah’s nation then, or the church of God now, are a peculiar people, from the first step of their calling to the last. Precious stones, gold, silver, and the ribband of blue, designated the people that God called out. “to make them a nation on the earth.” Added to ‘those personal pledges were the visible proofs by day and night, in the pillar and the cloud, that every movement of the camp was to be at the bidding of Him who was guiding them to “His holy habitation.” This favored nation was also to be God’s witness to the nations around; the people, therefore, were to be exempt from those diseases which were the common lot of mankind. Besides this, their land was to yield its increase and nothing to be barren in their midst—“five of them were to chase a hundred, and a hundred of them were to put ten thousand to flight.”

“The “ribband of blue,” which thus marked off this people outwardly in the flesh, witnessed of their moral nearness maintained by obedience to the law given them for their ethication, as well as to His statutes and judgments for their political government. Indeed, a closer examination of this scripture tells us so, and that the ribband was designed to be —admonitory and commemorative— “it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.” The admonitory character of this scripture is too obvious to need confirmation, and the reasons self-evident to an exercised conscience, who judges what sin is in the flesh. Yet while much of the ministry of Israel, and in later times necessarily all the ministry of the prophets, was admonitory, because failure had come in—still there was the service of Aaron and the priesthood, which embraced what was commemorative, like the Passover and the earlier feasts of the Lord—and what was anticipatory, like the blowing of the trumpets and the yet later feasts of Lev. 23. When the conscience of the people was thus awakened and exercised towards God, on the promise of recovery by obedience (“thou shalt remember and do”), their faith was also confirmed by priesthood and sacrifices, upon the ultimate ground of sovereign grace and blessing—forever and an on God was wont to proclaim Himself, “I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am the Lord your God.”

This identification of God with his people, was indeed their proper peculiarity, and it is the first thing to be recognized and borne in mind by us likewise, as we travel onward to meet Him. When the Israelite looked upon “the ribband of blue,” it was the abiding witness to him of Jehovah’s faithfulness, though conscious ofttimes of his own failure in not walking up to its character and claims. If the people judged themselves by this heavenly blue in the light of Jehovah’s love (of which it was the token) they would seek conformity to His mind in a fuller obedience to His statutes and laws. If, on the other hand, they discovered distance and contradiction by only looking at themselves, and snatched this ribband from their garments, it would be a denial of the unfailing grace of the God who bade them wear it. What a moment for the soul when conscious of its shortcoming!

But we must also add the prohibitory character of this ribband of blue, “that ye seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes, after which ye need to go a whoring.” Here it is that the ax is laid at the root of the tree; for the flesh, the nature itself is now in question—the heart and eyes.

Solemn lessons are thus brought to light, as those best know who are now called to learn what the “truth is in Jesus,” and who “have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” Judaism could only detect indwelling sin and put the guilt of it upon the conscience, and point to the incoming remedy, “the faith which should afterward be revealed.” Christianity teaches another lesson and begins with Christ; and for us to reach conformity to Him must be by death to the flesh through His cross, and redemption by His blood. Believers now are born again— of the Spirit, that they may bring forth fruit unto God and walk as children of the light. What a privilege to. justify God (however humbling it be to man in the flesh) in what He has so lovingly and patiently brought to light, that in “the fullness of time” He might bring in His Son and turn every eye to Him, as the embodiment of all that is heavenly bright and blue.

Prohibitions or lessons, both commemorative and admonitory, though equally witnessed by the ribband of blue, were seen and understood by a people in the flesh under Moses—but only to make the painful discovery that the roan who wore it on his garment needed something more: “for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law... But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Nevertheless, the ribband could witness and point faith onward to a future day, when Israel will be brought under the new covenant and under Christ as their Mediator, when all around and in them shall be alike consistent with this heavenly color and character in their bright history of millennial glory. “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” In the meanwhile, it is for Christians, as such men knowing their heavenly standing and calling, under the anointing of the Holy Ghost—to “ put on the Lord Jesus

Christ.”

The natural life of man, surrounded by all that God had given, and watched over as Israel nationally was in Canaan, gave way, and the people, alas, broke down under the weight of the blessing! “The ribband of blue” is now dispensationally hid, as between Jehovah and His earthly people, and they are no longer His witnesses on account of their unfaithfulness. When John the Baptist came as the forerunner of Christ to the nation of Israel, he was in the wilderness, and “his raiment was of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins.” What a contrast! So when the Messiah Himself came into their midst, He was there as the “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” and had not where to lay His head. When He served them in His ministry of love, it was by healing their sick, opening the eyes of the blind, casting out devils, and preaching deliverance to the captives. Again what a contrast! Finally, He wept over Jerusalem, saying, “Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

While the nation continues in its impenitence, and the vail is upon their hearts instead of the ribband of blue upon the fringes of their garments—while the Messiah is hidden in the heavens waiting the latter day of earthly glory, when the land shall again be married—what is God doing? Another race of people is called out to know this rejected One at the right hand of God, as the head of His body, the church. What is the new characteristic of this people? They “bear about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in their body.” This is the new badge and token of identification with Christ— “for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”

May we understand better than ever the ribband of blue of earlier days-only accepting the antitype, as we are now taught to connect it with Christ, our rejected Lord, and wear it in his absence, the token that we “are not of the world, even as” He was “not of the world”—till He comes, and we are changed into His likeness. B.

clickbible.org