Numbers - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

From Egypt to Caanan, Serpent of Brass and the Jordan, The

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({vi 4342-4359}Num. 21:1-18; {vi 5936-5950}Josh. 5:1-15.)

We will now look at the truth connected with " the serpent of brass," and " the Jordan." They are two aspects of the death of Christ. Each presents the truth in an entirely different way, but still a way in which it is of the last importance for our souls to get hold of. I think in the serpent of brass we have the wonderful truth of how God gets rid of me, for Himself, and in the Jordan, we have the truth of how I can get rid of myself, in my own experience.

The purpose of God for Israel, as given in the book of Exodus, was, that He would bring them out from Egypt, and bring them into a good land and large, a land flowing with milk and honey. It is an immense thing for the soul to ever deepen in the apprehension of God's purpose, and that, no matter what comes in, God's purpose will not be frustrated. Spite of all the opposition of Pharaoh, and spite of the many compromises that Pharaoh suggested, God brought them out, and spite of Israel's failure in the wilderness, He brought them into Canaan.

First of all comes the truth of the blood on the lintel, redemption by blood. That is the aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ by which we are secured from God's judgment, as sinners, and we feed on " the lamb roast with fire "-the sufferings and death of Christ-our souls entering into that which is expressed in His death.

Then we have the passage of the Red Sea That we have seen is the truth of the death and resurrection of Christ for us and our sins, the power of the enemy absolutely broken, God's salvation manifested, and the people brought to rejoice in it. The Red Sea, I believe, is the death and resurrection of Christ for our sins, as for ourselves also. And it is a great thing for a young soul to see this, that I am clear of the enemy's land, that I am brought right out from that land by death and resurrection. You touch the same truth in a certain way when you come to the Jordan. It is a great thing for my soul to see that I am before God in connection with Christ, dead and risen. It is what you get in the epistle to the Romans. I believe, what the Red Sea teaches me, as well as the epistle to the Romans, is, that I am taken into death to escape all that was against me. By death-Christ's death viewed as mine-I escape everything that oppresses me as a man in the flesh. In Rom. 5 you escape from association with the first man-Adam-death breaks the link; in chapter 6, you escape from sin as a master; and in chapter 7 you escape the condemnation that is connected with an infringed law.

It is very striking to notice that you see Israel as a company go into the Red Sea, but you never see them come out. They did come out, but it does not say they did. I think the reason is this, that when you come to the Jordan, you do not read of them going into the Jordan, you see the ark going in, but you see

them come out. The fact is this, the Red Sea and the Jordan coalesce. To bring them out of Egypt and to bring them into Canaan was God's purpose.

But, you say, the wilderness came in between. Yes, but that was not part of the purpose of God. It was in His ways, but His purpose was to bring them out, and bring them in. The forty years in between became the occasion of learning what they were, and gave occasion also to learn God's ways of grace. If you look at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews you will be struck with this. " By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." That is, nature could not walk in the pathway of faith. And what is the next word? " By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days " (vers. 29, 30). You have no mention of Jordan. Why? Because the journey through the wilderness, with Jordan at the end, was not the path of faith, it was the path of failure. When God recounts the history of the life of faith, you have the Red Sea and the fall of Jericho put together. They go side by side, and the forty years in the wilderness is not as much as mentioned.

Well, delivered by the sovereign grace of God, and brought out of Egypt as we have seen, it took them forty years to enter Canaan. Their journey was divided into four stages. The first, with which we are all pretty familiar, is from the banks of the Red Sea till they come to Sinai (Ex. 15-19:1, 2). In that stage of their journey they were under pure sovereign grace. If they come to Marah, where the waters are bitter, God turns the bitter water into sweet. When hungry, He gives them bread from-heaven. If they say, We are dying of thirst, He smites the rock, and out comes water. If they have an enemy to meet, there is Moses interceding for them on high, and Joshua leading them on to certain victory in the valley below. There we have the energy of a risen Christ, by the Holy Ghost, leading God's people to victory.

The first stage takes you to the middle of the book of Exodus. The latter half of the book is occupied with the instructions connected with the setting up of the tabernacle, in which God was to dwell. Leviticus gives to us the manner of their approach to God. Christ is presented in all these types and figures as the basis of all worship. That is the great subject of the book of Leviticus.

When you come to Numbers you get the itinerary of the people of God through the wilderness. The chapter I have read is really in the last stage of their history. They are getting toward the close of their journey when the story of the serpent of brass comes in. To connect our subject I will glance briefly over the early part of the book.

The first ten chapters of the book are occupied with marshalling them, and getting them ready for the journey. The book of Numbers opens with, " And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt" (Num. 1:1). The first thirteen months, the first stage of their journey, was occupied in getting from the Red Sea to Sinai, where you know, in fatal folly, they put themselves under law. They abandoned grace and took upon themselves the responsibility of walking before God, consenting that their blessing should depend upon their own behavior. We have all,

however, to learn as we pass on that the only secret of blessing is the grace of God, in connection with His purpose.

Well now, in the first ten chapters of Num. 1 repeat, you learn the way in which God marshalled them, gathered them round about Him, and how He Himself was in their midst. When you come to chapter 10 you read, " And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony" (ver. 11). That is, in twenty days they are all put in order. God was then in their very midst, but Moses, like the rest of us, wanting something down here for the eye to rest on, as a guide through the wilderness, turns to Hobab and says, You be eyes for us. " Come with us... leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be unto us instead of eyes " (vers. 29-32). The child of the desert refuses to be their guide, and in tender grace the Lord says, I shall go before you, and the ark of the Lord becomes their guide. The pillar of cloud had been their guide before, but the Lord, in His beautiful grace, now goes before them Himself. " And the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them " (ver. 33). This was beautiful grace, beloved friends, in meeting failure.

And now you come to that which is a very sorrowful bit of their history. The second stage of their history was very short, but very eventful. It embraces chapters 10:11-36, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. They reached Kadesh very quickly (see 12:16, 13:26).

It was only an eleven days' journey from Sinai to Kadesh—barnea (Deut. 1:2), but there was an immense amount of, dreadful failure in those few days. In the eleventh chapter you find them saying, " But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes " (ver. 6). That is, in plain language, they got tired of Christ. Ah, beloved, are any of us tired of Christ? Do I want something besides Christ? That is the first failure.

The end of the chapter shows that the Lord gave them quails, in answer to their murmuring, and then dealt with them in His government (vers. 31-34). " He gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel" ({vi 15143-15145}Psa. 78:29-31). You will all, I am sure, be struck with this comment of the Spirit of God, in the Psalms, upon this scene. I believe really what we want we get. If I want flesh, God will give it me, but discipline and leanness of soul with it. The hand of God in government was upon them here really. It was not like the first case, in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus, where they asked, and God gave them quails. Then they were upon the ground of pure grace, but now, being on the ground of responsibility, He acts differently. There it was sin met by grace, here it is sin judged in government.

Then in the twelfth chapter of Numbers the priest, Aaron, and the prophetess, Miriam, rise up against Moses, who was king in Jeshurun-God's representative. When you come to the next chapter they send out spies to see what the pleasant land was like, and to see by what way they should go (see {vi 4915-4918}Deut. 1:22-25). I quite admit God permitted the spies to go, for He did not thwart Israel in their unbelief. Hence He said, " Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel " (Num. 13:2). They sent up these spies, and as unbelief always brings trouble to the unbeliever, I daresay you have noticed that this mission was the way Arad knew that Israel were coming, and went out to fight against them (see Num. 21:1). Unbelief always brings sorrow. The next thing is that when the spies come back the congregation will not believe what is told them.

First of all the report is very good, and the bunch of grapes-taking two men to carry it-attested the goodness of the land, and then they said, " The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature " (ver. 32); that is, the land did not give plenty of provision. Caleb and Joshua stood up for the truth, and were nearly stoned (13:30, 14:6-10). "They despised the pleasant land " (Psa. 106:24) is the next step. They did not want to go on. It is like a heart now that does not want to go to heaven.

Next they say, " Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God that we had died in this wilderness. And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" (chap. 14:1-4). Let us go back, they say. Oh, could you suppose it after all the grace shown to them? But, beloved, we know what our own hearts are. Have we never wished to turn back? Ah, every heart in this hall knows how often there has been a turning back. God's answer was this: You say you wish you had died in the wilderness-you shall die in the wilderness. " As for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness, and your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness " (14:32, 33). Says God, You will have to die, only it will take you forty years to do it, " After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years " (ver. 34). They must know death.

Then the fifteenth chapter comes in. Did you ever study the fifteenth chapter of Numbers? It is a beautiful chapter. Why? Because God's purpose shines in it as clear as ever, spite of the sin of the people. It opens thus, " And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you" (ver. 2). Ah, it is lovely! I get the Lord giving directions as to what shall be when they get into the land, as though there had never been a murmur, or any failure. It is a gem, that chapter. It comes in as the expression of how God s purpose is never upset. No matter what the people's sin is on the road, God carries out His purpose regarding them. A perusal of the chapter will let you see how beautifully the truth comes out in that way. That chapter takes you to the end of the second stage of Israel's journeyings.

And now in the third stage the Lord makes them wander for thirty-eight years in the wilderness, and when you come to the twentieth chapter you will find that they have got back again to Kadesh. If you trace their journeyings you will find that they consist of aimless wanderings up and down the peninsula of Arabia, from Kadesh (12:16, 13:26) to Kadesh (chap. 20:1), and no real progress made. What a picture of many a saint now, who has rebelled against God, and never really got on in his soul.

In this third stage you have the rebellion of Korah (chap. 16), which leads God in grace to manifest who is His priest (chap. 17). The only way in which a feeble people can be brought right through the wilderness to God's Sanctuary is by grace and priesthood. Oh, how much we, as Christians, owe to the priesthood of Christ! How we are maintained by that blessed One! In the eighteenth chapter you have instructions as to the maintenance of the priests, and in the nineteenth chapter you have the story of the red heifer, or how, in the wilderness, defilement can be met and cleansed.

And then, when you come to the twentieth chapter, again there is no water, and there it is that Moses and Aaron break down, because they did not glorify God. God bade Moses go and speak to the rock. He was told by God to " take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together,

thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock " (ver. 8). He was to take the rod of priesthood. It was not judgment that was to be expressed, but grace through priesthood. It is priestly grace that puts a heart right, always. " And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the

congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice" (vers. 9-11). That was not the rod the Lord bade him take. He smote it with the rod that he had smitten Egypt with, the rod of judgment. That is a figure of the death of Christ, undergoing the judgment of God. There can be no repetition, even in type, of that. God's answer was this: " And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them " (ver. 12). Thus, you see, Moses and Aaron break down on the road, and the latter dies (ver. 28). Then the next thing is that there is opposition on the part of Edom, and Israel, humbled at last, gives way.

And now in the twenty-second verse of chapter 20, they begin the fourth, and last stage of their journey, which occupied about one year or so. Then in the twenty-first chapter we have another outbreak of evil, and the story of the serpent of brass. It is very simple, but I do not think that we learn its truth at the beginning of our Christian pathway. Oh, you say, is it not about the new birth? Well, it is connected with it in John 3, but there is something deeper than merely meeting the need of a poor sinner. What comes out here is, that the flesh is incurable and incorrigible. They murmured, and the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died " (ver. 6). But then as they turned to the Lord, and owned their sin, He bade Moses make a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and when a bitten man looked upon it he lived (vers. 5-9). There, in type, is the wonderful truth that Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin. It is the spring of a totally new life. Our Lord, in the third chapter of John's Gospel, connects it with eternal life, and I do not doubt that the things that are in figure in this chapter are brought out in the doctrine of John 3 and 4. The first man is incurably bad, cannot be mended, and must go from before God's eye. He must go in death, in judgment, that is the point. That is to say, there is nothing in you or me that will suit God. All that we are must go in death, and there is brought in that which is entirely and absolutely new. It is Christ, as Son of Man, lifted up, in {vi 26135-26136}John 3:14, 15, and, as a consequence, through faith in Him, not only new birth, but eternal life, and in the fourth of John you have the water springing up to eternal life, i.e., life in the power of the Holy Ghost rising to its source-the Father-in worship.

Look again for a moment at the serpent of brass. The thing that did the mischief was the fiery serpent, and what cured them was a look at a fiery serpent. Sin brought in death, and only by death is sin put away. Sin in the flesh is incorrigible, incurable, and ineradicable. What then can be done with it? God tells us: " For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). That is the serpent of brass. What I am, as a man, has been utterly condemned in the cross of Christ, and absolutely set aside from before God in death. It has gone from God's eye in the death of His blessed Son, an immense thing for the soul to see. Why? Because until this is learned, there is self-confidence, and an endeavor to improve the flesh. Hence, very often, we have to learn by very painful and prolonged practical experience and failure what a poor good-for-nothing thing man is. When I learn the truth of the serpent of brass I find that God has got rid of me, in the cross of His Son, and only Christ remains.

Next you get, " And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it" (21:17, 18). That is in type what the Lord said to the woman at the well, " If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" ({vi 26167;26170-26171}John 4:10, 13, 14). What is that? Why, beloved friend, it is the Spirit of God in the bosom of the Christian, in the soul of the believer, now leading your soul up in the enjoyment of eternal life into that which is yours in heaven, although you are still in the wilderness. " Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." That is the Spirit of God carrying the heart now into the enjoyment of heavenly things, that really are our own. It is the energy of the Holy Ghost in the Christian. It is not a bit of use for me to tell you to get rid of this thing and that. You will never do it. What we want to know is the unhindered energy of the Holy Ghost. He will occupy us with Christ, He will bring Christ to us, and tell us of Christ. " Gather the people together, and I will give them water." Oh, how God loves thus to set His people up in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost.

You do not get the serpent of brass until the close of Israel's wilderness history. It is a long time before we learn that God has set us aside, and aim to set ourselves aside. Oh, what battles and struggles have souls gone through in trying to get rid of the flesh. I see here, with deep relief and thankfulness, that aspect of the death of Christ in which all that I am, as a man in the flesh, is gone, and that I am replaced by the Man of God's heart, the Man out of heaven, the Lord from heaven. And it is He in the energy and power of the Spirit of God that leads the soul on.

The final effort of the devil to prevent them entering the land is given in the section ({vi 104377-104473}Num. 22-25) which introduces Balaam. He is hired to curse them, but really he blesses them, and in his remarkable prophecies shows that they are God's people; separated to Him (23:9); justified by Him (23:21-23); seen of Him in order and beauty only (24:5-9), and destined to victory and glory with Him (24:17-19). He always wins who is on God's side.

Balaam was a wicked man, but he knew God would judge evil, specially in His people, so he " taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication " (Rev. 2:14).

He tried to corrupt them by mixing with the world religiously and socially. Some fell into the snare, and came under God's judgment.

How many of God's people. today are caught in the same way!

In chapter 27 the daughters of Zelophehad indicate that at length there is a desire for the pleasant land instead of despising it. They claim their father's portion, and God honors the demand of faith. He ever loves to give. Hence "the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right; thou shalt surely give them a possession " (vers. 6, 7).

The spirit that moved these women did not animate the whole congregation, for in chapter 32 The children of Reuben and Gad ask that their families and flocks may not be carried over the Jordan, now in full sight.

They actually fell into Pharaoh's snare. They did not want to go over the Jordan. They saw that the land of Gilead was a nice place, and they said to Moses, If you will allow us, we will leave our wives and little ones and cattle here, and we will go over and help you to fight and then return to them. Ah, it was a very sad thing, beloved. They are like souls that do not go in now for heavenly things. It is important for the soul to see this. Hear what they say: " And bring us not over Jordan " (chap. 32:5). Oh, beloved friends, God keep us from ever breathing a word like that. Put into plain language, it is, I do not want to enter now into heavenly things. Ah, they had dropped right down into that which Pharaoh proposed, and Moses refused. In very sight of Canaan they say, We will settle down where we are. They were not content with a tent, they wanted a house. Yet when the devil tried to hinder them through Balaam, he said one of the truest and loveliest things about them.: " How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel." These tents had been forty years on the road, and the dwellers therein were going to get into the land, and Balaam felt that they would get in. But, alas, these two tribes were tired of the tent, and said, We will settle down. "We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones " 16). God let them have their way, and they were the first to be carried into captivity (see 2 Kings 15:29). Ah, beloved, what a lesson as to world-bordering and its results!

Now turn to Joshua, and you will see the way in which we are brought into the blessing that is ours. Joshua is the Old Testament equivalent for Ephesians, just as Ephesians is the New Testament Joshua. You will find in the opening chapter, " Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses " (chap. 1:3). It is no good for me, therefore, to say such and such things are mine. It is quite true they are mine in Christ, but they are not mine experimentally unless I put my foot on them. It is a great thing for the soul to see that it is heavenly. God has called us to heaven. To heaven we belong, and everything that is ours is in heaven. We are pilgrims passing through this scene, but are viewed as belonging to heaven.

To enter into Canaan Israel must cross the Jordan, and they were simply to follow the ark. " Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. 3:4). Of course I need not say, the ark is Christ. It is Christ who has gone into death, as passing through the judgment of God, really ending man's history, and overcoming the power of death. In verse 14 they struck their tents in the wilderness for the last time. They had the pilgrim character about them to that moment.

It must have been a wonderful moment when they came to Jordan. It was a wonderful time when they came to the Red Sea, as we have seen. That was a very little strait, and they went in by fives, so also here. When it was a case of going into the Red Sea, it was a narrow path. The waters stood up as crystal walls. But when they came to Jordan there was not a drop of water within thirty miles. Jordan is death. So with us, all that I shrunk from is gone if I see that death is annulled by Christ Jordan is death, not my death, but Christ's, and mine with Him. It is not only death, but it is my getting the sense that Christ has gone into death, and annulled it, and overcome it. If you take your map and look for Zaretan (ver. 16), you will see it was some thirty miles up the river, and there God kept back the waters. There was nothing but dry land in sight, and we read, " The priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan " (3:17).

The lesson from this for us is simple. If the heart is set for heaven, it is easy to get in. It is wonderfully easy to get into the land if you are only set for heavenly things, for God takes every hindrance away, and He loves to get His people's hearts to dwell in the enjoyment of what He has now made theirs in Christ.

" And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man; and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging-place, where ye shall lodge this night" (4:1-3). It was the testimony of where the ark had been. I do not doubt that the twelve stones are the memorial. It is like what the Lord's Supper is to us.

But further, " And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day" (ver. 9). The putting in of these twelve stones expressed the whole of the company. What we were, so to speak, is all under the waters of death. I learn that in the death of Christ I am free to say good-bye to myself. I am a person dead and risen, and I have life in a risen Christ, but God would always keep alive in my memory the way in which I have been brought into blessing and association with His Son. To this end I think we are greatly helped in the Lord's Supper. " And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal " (ver. 20). They remained as the eternal witness of a finished work, just as the Lord's Supper speaks to us.

And now the next thing is they are consciously clean over Jordan. And, beloved, it is an immense thing for the soul to be consciously sure of this. It is a person who can truly say, I know I am dead and risen. Experimentally? Yes, certainly. The point is, I have deep in my soul the sense that I am in association with Him who is risen. Through grace we are occupied with a risen Christ all the week round, and then, at the Lord's Supper, for an hour our hearts are afresh touched with the sense of His death and all that it involved for Him and us.

When Israel reached Gilgal a new lesson was learned. Gilgal was the place of self-judgment. There they were circumcised (chap. 5:2-9). You cannot cut off the flesh in the energy of the flesh. They were a dead and risen people in figure, ere they were circumcised. And you will never find a Christian able to walk practically in the power of what this brings out, until he knows that he is before God in the life of Another. Where do we get this truth? I think you have it in Colossians.

Now, young Christian, look at the third chapter of Colossians. The second chapter says, " In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (ver. 10). I accept for myself the circumcision of Christ. I am set aside. I accept it. You are in newness of life now. What is the next thing? " If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God " (chap. 3) How definite! Where Christ is. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Note, it is earth here, not exactly the world, that is Egypt. If my affections are on the things of earth, clearly, I am not heavenly. That is the point. I can find worldly Christians, and earthly Christians, and again I can find souls that are heavenly. Ah, what a cheer it is to come alongside of a heavenly person.

And now the next word is, " Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.... Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth" ({vi 29521-29524}Col. 3:3-6).

That is, that I am to practically keep all that is of the first man in the place of death. That is our Gilgal. " And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal (i.e., rolling) unto this day." They set aside that which is the mark of a man who is living for this world. For a heavenly man to be worldly is his reproach. He needs to go again to Gilgal. And you will observe afterward that Israel always had to return to Gilgal. So must we. After victory or defeat, Gilgal-self-judgment—is our only recourse, if we are to progress in the divine life.

" And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month, at even, in the plains of Jericho" (ver. 10). They are out of Egypt, and in Canaan. The promise of God is faithfully kept, and His purpose carried out; though as yet nothing of Canaan is possessed, nor any victory gained. I have often thought how Caleb and Joshua must have enjoyed that passover. They had eaten it in Egypt, and, moreover, they had kept the passover in the wilderness (see {vi 3967-3980}Num. 9:1-14); but I am sure they enjoyed this one a great deal more than the first, or the second. When they ate the second they might have said to each other, " I like this much better than the one in Egypt. We were rather in fear of Pharaoh then, but now he is gone, and we are on our way to the land." Yes, but even then they were not in it. There was what was better in store for faith. But now they sit down and eat the passover in the land. They eat it in heavenly joy. So do we, if divinely taught. Our souls, fully enjoying which is the first thing that gave us the sense of the grace of our God. I believe Caleb and Joshua thoroughly enjoyed that passover, and if you and I are really over Jordan we shall enjoy the Lord's Supper in a wonderful way.

" And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and patched corn in the self-same day" (ver. 1). Yes, they had reached Christ in glory. It is Christ, now known in glory, the soul feeds on. The third chapter of Philippians is the old corn of the land. It is Christ known where He now is. " And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year " (ver. 12). But for us to eat the manna is most important. It is Christ humbled in human life here, and we as pilgrims, finding ourselves in the circumstances that He passed through, feed on Him and His ways of grace. That is manna. If I do not feed upon the manna, I certainly shall not be a steady pilgrim (a pilgrim is one who is going to a fixed point), and if I do not feed on the old corn of the land, I shall not be a vigorous warrior. We need both. They had both, and both the manna and the old corn of the land are to be our daily food. " Unleavened cakes and parched corn " they partook of there, and may God give us to feed on the same, and thus enter more and more into the enjoyment of what is our own, as risen with Christ.

" And it came to pass, when Joshua came by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so " (vers. 13-15). The captain of the Lord's host is the Lord Himself. With drawn sword in hand He would now lead them to victory; but " Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy," reminds us that holiness becomes His presence now, just as when He came to redeem His people (Ex. 3:5). If I am going to enter into heavenly joys and associations with Christ, and be led to victory, there must be, so to speak, the putting off of the shoe, the withdrawal of the foot from what has touched the earth. If you take the shoe off, the foot will be clean. God will have holiness in those that draw near to Him.

It is wonderful what God, by His Spirit, will bring our souls into, if we but yield ourselves to Him. The man that knows most about heaven will, perhaps, say the least about it, but he enjoys it and lives there.

Here, then, we shall conclude our study of Israel's early history. They are in the land that flows with milk and honey, feeding on the old corn thereof-that which grew in the land-and have, the Lord Himself as their leader to future victories.

May God guide us each to answer to this in the history of our souls. We are to know ourselves risen with Christ; then we feed on Christ, and are to be led by Him to victory over all enemies who oppose our acquisition and enjoyment of heavenly life and blessings.

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God's Restoring Grace, Confession and Cleansing

(Numbers 19:1-22)

It is very interesting to see in Scripture, especially a type like this, how God provides for anything that might come in to interfere with the communion of His people with Himself. He loves to have us in His presence, and He loves to have us there happily, that we might be there able to commune with Him. And if there intervene anything, that puts us out of communion, it is blessed to see the way the Lord comes in to remove the hindrance.

I am going to connect this chapter with that which was before us last, viz., Peter's fall. We will see presently how the Lord restores him. But I turn to this scripture because it gives you a figure of that which meets every kind of interception of communion, produced by things other than gross failure or sin.

Genesis is the book of creation. Exodus is the book of redemption. Leviticus is the book of approach to God. And then Numbers presents to you the people passing through the wilderness where things come in to hinder communion. It gives the passage of the people through the wilderness, where they might be defiled, and where the enemy ever beset them.

Our chapter shows how a soul that has got in any sense defiled is restored. Sin is always the working of the will of the creature. If the will has wrought, sin has come into activity, communion with God is destroyed, and then there is distance. A red heifer was to be taken, and it was to be one in whom there was no blemish, and upon which never came yoke. You have Christ brought before you immediately. The yoke of sin was never on Christ. Alas! we have had the yoke of sin upon us.

The perfection of the sacrifice is the first thing here. " And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face" (ver. 3). The red heifer is the type of Christ, who is also the priest, hence he does not slay. Death, however, comes in. The only way I can get back to God, if I have slipped away from Him, is by the application to my soul, in the power of the Holy Ghost, of the wonderful truth of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The heifer is slain, and then the priest sprinkles the blood before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times (ver. 4). You are here reminded of the great thought of atonement. First of all, you see, if it be a question of my sins being put away, or access to God, it is always by blood. And then here, where you have the basis of restoration of a saint, who has gone aside from the Lord, the striking thing you meet with again is the blood.

But here, you must observe, the blood is not for you. There can never be any re-application of the blood of Christ. The blood here is sprinkled, not on the defiled person, but before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times. That is, it is to be under the eye of God. He ever remembers the value of the atoning death of His beloved Son.

Now, when you and I have taken our own way, and the conscience has got defiled, what is the way back? Oh, you say, I will go back as a poor sinner, and be again washed in the blood of Christ. You will never get back that way, for it is not God's way, and not seeing this has kept many an erring child a long time out of restoring grace. How must you come back? You will have to come back as a saint, as a naughty child who has been doing his own will, and you will have to come back in God's way. " And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: and one shall burn the heifer in his sight, her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn " (vers. 4, 5). It is not a pleasant way I admit. But still it is God's way.

Note the ritual here, for it is full of instruction. The whole thing was consumed. All goes in the fire of judgment. The priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer. Here is this victim slain, and then burnt to ashes. It is a striking figure of all that the blessed Lord Jesus Christ passed through when on the cross, where He was made sin. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin. The heifer burnt to ashes is the striking figure of what the first man deserved, and received in the Person of Christ when on the cross: all was consumed there in death. All that I am disappears from God's eye in death I With the heifer is burned also the cedar tree, which is always the figure, in Scripture, of what is lofty, and noble, and grand.

And the hyssop, what is that? A little bit of a shrub. It is the other end of the vegetable kingdom, it is insignificant. Solomon " spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall" (I Kings 4:33). I do not deny that there is something noble in man, and, of course, you will admit there is something nasty in man. We all of us have grand eyes for that. You can see a mote in my eye? Yes, but you do not see the beam in your own eye? We can all see faults in each other, that is very easy. What do I learn here? Whether it be lofty and great, or ignoble and useless, it all has to go, in the burning of the heifer.

Hyssop has a large place in Scripture. A bunch of hyssop was dipped in the blood, and put on the lintel and the two side posts of the door on the passover day (Ex. 12:22). Hyssop was plunged in the running water when the leper was cleansed (Lev. 14:4-6). Hyssop was burned here. David in agony of soul says, " Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean " (Psa. 51:7). Again: " They filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth" (John 19:29), in the moment of our blessed Lord's dying agonies on the cross. It has a wonderful meaning in Scripture, connected with man's littleness, while the scarlet indicates the glory of man.

So that whether I think of what is ignoble, or great, or of all that man can glory in, thank God, all goes. There is only one Man- who will do for God, and that is the Man who is in the glory of God. The first man with all his glories, and all his insignificance is removed in judgment. I do not deny there are qualities in man that are beautiful in themselves, but they will not do for God. The first man is absolutely set aside.

It is a great point to apprehend this intelligently, and to say with Paul, " For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing " (Rom. 7:18), and then, as taught by grace, to learn," I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). If I look back at the cross, I see the man who did the sin gone there. It is immense gain to see that all goes in the burning of the heifer.

Then the next thing is, the priest must wash his clothes, as well as he who burnt her (vers. 7, 8). And then, "A man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin " (ver. 9). The ashes of the heifer simply but surely bring to your memory what has taken place. They are all that is left of that wonderful victim. There is nothing left but the ashes. All else has been consumed in the fire of judgment. By these ashes, as a figure, the Spirit of God brings to the memory of the soul, in certain circumstances, what it cost Christ to make us clean, and apart therefrom we shall not know, after failure, what purification really is.

You cannot touch anything connected with the first man without being defiled, hence we read, " He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days " (ver. 11). Well, you might say, in the ordinary course of my daily duty I come in contact with many things that are apt to defile me. That is what is supposed here. " 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"

(ver. 12). But God does not let us make light of sin. The defiled man was to purify himself on the third day, and on the seventh day, and so be clean. The double purification shows that restoration does not take place in a moment. If my soul has got away from the Lord, it does not get back just in a moment. God gives me time to ponder what my folly has been.

" Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him " (ver. 13). If I get into evil, and do not judge and get rid of it, I am hurting other people. A heedless man then " defiled the tabernacle of the Lord," and if I am going on with what is wrong I am thereby contaminating my brethren. I am one of the congregation, do you not see? How careful, therefore, ought to be our walk for the sake of others. But verse 13 goes further: "That soul shall be cut off from Israel, because the water of separation was not sprinkled on him." He died. For us it is not death, but the unclean saint is out of communion. He does not get the joy that belongs to the company. He is outside morally, and practically. Why? Because there was a way of putting himself right, and he did not avail himself of it. He was careless.

" This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone

of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days" (vers. 14-16). Contact with evil in any form affects us, and hinders communion. It is a great thing to keep the covering on the open vessel. What is the meaning of that? There must be reserve. If you go and walk, and talk with the careless, and the godless, you will very soon find yourself out of communion. God bids us keep the cover bound on the open vessel. This world has a dirty atmosphere, and if it be not covered it becomes defiled. We want Christ to cover our eyes, and fill our hearts every hour of the day (ver. 16). You cannot even go to help a person who has fallen into sin without toning down a little bit yourself. Having to hear of evil, even in the way of judgment, affects us, just as he who touched a bone of a man, or a grave, was unclean seven days.

" And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel; and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean " (vers. 17-20). Observe, a clean person was to sprinkle upon the unclean, on the third day, and on the seventh day. What is the meaning of that? Each sets forth a different stage in the process of soul-restoration. On the third day I have brought home to me that I have been taking my pleasure in the things that cost Christ the agonies, and the unspeakable sufferings of the cross. This will be accompanied by honest and full confession of the sin to God. There comes into the soul then a very deep sense of sorrow for the sin, whatever it may have been. The soul is filled with horror as it says, I have been sinning against grace; but, along with this, there comes a feeling of deep bitterness, because after all I shall not suffer for it, nor will it be imputed to me, since Christ has already suffered for it. I have been taking my pleasure in all that cost Him the agonies of the cross. He has taken the sin, and borne it and its consequences. And the soul passes through deep, deep exercise-the deeper the better.

It is not the first day after the sin that all this is learned. No, God gives me three days in which to contemplate what the effect on my soul has been of my taking my own way. The ashes is the death of Christ, and the running water is the energy of the Holy Spirit of God bringing to my soul what Christ passed through. He says, Christ has died for you, and He has borne the judgment of God for you, and this very sin that you found pleasure in, drew from His soul that agonizing cry, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And in my soul is wrought the deep sense of what a wretch I am, for I have been finding pleasure in what cost Him pain.

Then comes the seventh day, and now there is the sense in the soul of grace abounding over sin. The

Lord has forgiven me? Yes! And there is immediately a sense of joy to think that I am perfectly clean through the work that Jesus in His love to me has wrought, and that the grace that met me as a sinner has met me as a saint. Now the sprinkling has taken place on the third day, and on the seventh day, and the soul is declared clean, and is consciously clean.

Then a practical change takes place likewise in the soul. Not only can it say, I am perfectly clean, but my sin has not altered His heart. He loves me still! His death is still efficacious to cleanse! It is dreadful to lose the enjoyment of His love, and the comfort that the Holy Ghost would give. We pay a terrible price for our own pleasure. But oh, the joy of restoration! Who does not covet it? The sense of the horror of sinning against grace would seem to be the first part of the cleansing on the third day. On the seventh day perfect restoration occurs as the mind is quite cleared of all soil of sin by the abounding of grace over sin. I first of all get the sense of sorrow, that I have sinned against grace, and then I get the sense, I am forgiven because His grace has not changed (Rom. 6).

It is a great thing for the soul to get hold of this-if I have grieved His love, His love is there to be grieved. But then I lose the enjoyment of that love in my soul until the day comes when I judge myself and repent. That is what Peter did, I have no doubt. I think I see Peter on the third day in Mark 16:7, where a servant, who failed as such (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39), alone records the words sent to Peter, and again in Luke 24 when the Lord meets him privately. We find him on the seventh day, in John 21:15-19, fully at rest in his Lord's love, and trusted by Him.

Notice that the cleansed man washes his clothes. What is that? He changes his ways altogether, and gets rid of the thing that was the hindrance. He is practically washed by the Word.

Now come to New Testament scriptures to connect them with this type. " If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (t John 1:6-10). Understand, young Christian, although you are converted, and although the blood of Christ has washed all your sins away, still the truth remains that sin is still in you. The flesh is in us. " If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." If I were to say, I have no sins, that may be quite true. But if I say, I have no sin, I deceive myself. That is what a perfectionist has been often led to say. It is nothing in the world but a positive delusion.

On the other hand, am I to be ever burdened with the sense of what my sins are? God thus replies: " If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness " (ver. 9). You are thus practically purged, do you not see, but it is always through confession to God, not to man, I need scarcely say. If there be anything burdening your soul, you must go and confess it. You will never be right till you have made a clean breast of it. " God knows all about it," you say. That is quite true, but you will never be right till you have confessed it to Him. Then comes the sense of what grace is, but you will never be right till you have told the Lord everything.

I know that many go on for years, wretched and miserable, and, oh, what lack there is of joy and testimony. That soul is not right with God. My friend, let me implore you, do not you sleep till you have made a clean breast of it all to God. If you are going to be happy and useful, there must be no reserve. There have been no reserves on His side, let there be none on our side.

" My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not," we now read. Do I suppose that a Christian ought to be sinning? No. " But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Beautiful words! The Advocate is Jesus; He restores me to the Father. If I have sinned and got away, I cannot come back to God as a sinner. I must come back to the Father as a child, a naughty child it may be, but a child. It is a blessed thing to see, that before Peter fell, Christ, the Advocate with the Father, had prayed for him. Ah, beloved, how He loves us. You get that deep down into your heart, and you will be all right.

" And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world " (ver. 2). There we really have the ashes of the heifer. If I sin, He will pray for me, and then the Spirit of God will make me feel it. It is He, the other Comforter, that, in faithful love to my soul, has brought in the cloud. When you see what it was that produced the cloud, you judge it, and you confess it. And when you confess it, He forgives it. And then you say, Blessed Lord, how Thou lovest me! The effect always is, that you get nearer to Him than ever you were before. Such is His grace.

Of course, if I have done wrong to my brother or my neighbor, I must go and own it. I shall never get right till I have put things right there. Not only must I get right with God, but with my neighbor if I have trespassed against him, because God desires to cleanse from all unrighteousness. Now mark, if we have fallen out with a brother or a sister, our Lord's injunctions for you and me in this respect are plain (see Lev. 5; 6; Matt. 18). The whole point is this, Christ always loves for us to do the right thing. I know in my heart that I shall never get on spiritually unless I am honest and clear with God on the one hand, and with my brethren on the other hand. How splendid is Paul's testimony. " Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men " (Acts 24:16).

We will now turn to Peter's restoration for a moment or two. I believe in Luke 24 you get the third day. I find that on the third day, the resurrection day, the Lord overtook the two disciples going to Emmaus, and He went with them. It is very interesting to see the way in which the Lord makes Himself known to His own in resurrection. The first heart that He met, and filled, was Mary's, and then her companions. Mary's was a heart that delighted in Him profoundly, and missed Him unspeakably. The next heart He looked after was one that had got away from Him-Peter's. The two going to Emmaus seem to come next. They said, " Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures" (ver. 32). They had never heard such a discourse in all their lives, as He gave them in that eight-mile walk. Why, our hearts glow, and are almost fit to burst, when a dear servant of the Lord, in the power of the Holy Ghost, is opening up the Scriptures to us. But fancy hearing the Lord "expounding unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (ver. 27). No wonder their hearts burned within them.

When "they drew nigh unto the village whither they went, he made as though he would have gone further, but they constrained him, saying, Abide with us" (ver. 29). He does not force His company. But when they got to their house, and the Lord moved to go on, they said, " Abide with us." They constrained Him. They brought to bear upon Him the pressure that love always exercises. They had so enjoyed His ministry that they could not do without it. They did not know who He was, but they had found out that He knew more about the One whom they loved than any one they had met before, so they constrained Him to stay. Well, He goes inside, breaks the bread, and thus He is made known to them in that way. They now know who He is, and then He vanishes.

"And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon " (vers. 33, 34). Back they march to Jerusalem. Just before it was too late to go any farther; now, filled with joy, it was not too late for them to go all the way back. They had walked eight miles out, and it was nothing at all to go the eight miles back again, to carry the tidings of their interview with Jesus, and to share the news. When they got there, they found the eleven gathered, and them that were with them. It was not an apostolic company. It was the company of the disciples generally. "The Lord is risen indeed," they said, "and hath appeared to Simon." Mark you, it was the third day, and I do not doubt that Peter had begun to taste the value of the ashes and the running water in that unique interview. Here I think we only get his private restoration. What the Lord said to Peter, I do not know, but this I know, Peter was restored.

He had met the Lord, and he had heard words from the Lord. God has flung a veil over the scene. I have no doubt at all, it was the Lord that sought Peter. You will find in the twelfth verse of this same chapter that Peter had departed, "wondering in himself at that which was come to pass." I will guarantee, before the day was out, that he wondered very much more, as he found that his blessed Lord had come after him, and that everything was forgiven, and that he was restored to the affections of his Lord. In spite of all his sin there was nothing in the heart of his blessed Lord but deep, deep affection for him.

When you come to carefully read Peter's epistles you will find there is scarcely a verse in which he does not allude, in some way or other, openly, or tacitly, to the fact of his fall. For instance, " For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). Had not he been a sheep astray? He had, beloved, but Jesus, the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul, had restored him.

I will take up what I call Peter's public restoration another time, and we shall sec the way in which the Lord re-establishes His dear servant, and tenderly commissions him. It is a pattern of the way He restores the hearts that may have slipped away from Him. But unless there has been a personal meeting with Him, there is nothing effected. You may hear as much about the Lord's grace, and the Lord's love as you like, but there will never be anything in your soul of real restoration till you and He get all alone, and have it out together. May the Lord indeed make His love more and more precious to all our souls for His name's sake.

0 Lamb of God, still keep me

Close to Thy wounded side;

'Tis only there in safety

And peace I can abide.

When foes and snares surround me,

When lusts and fears within I

The grace that sought and found me

Alone can keep me clean.

Tis only in Thee hiding

I feel my life secure,

Only in Thee abiding

The conflict can endure:Thine arm the victory gaineth

O'er every hateful foe,

Thy love my heart sustained'

In all its care and woe.

Soon shall my eyes behold Thee,

With rapture, face to face!One-half bath not been told me

Of all Thy power and grace.

Thy beauty, Lord, and glory,

The wonders of Thy love,

Shall be the endless story

Of all Thy saints above.

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