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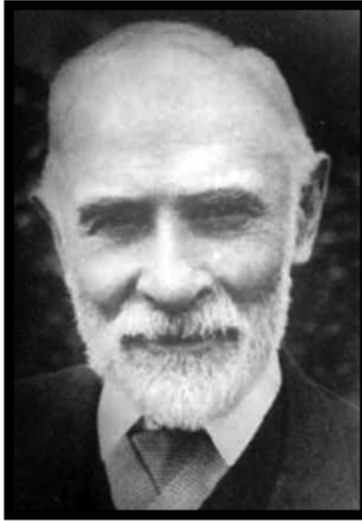
V04 Outline of the Book of
Numbers

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PREFATORY NOTE

The book of Numbers has great spiritual value as bringing out, typically, the order and service of God's people viewed as the assembly in the wilderness. It also points out very clearly different forms of unbelief and rebellion by which many have been diverted from the truth, and which are a danger to us all. But as the history continues we are made to realise that divine grace and faithfulness cannot be frustrated by any device of the enemy. The many provisions made for abnormal conditions show that God has taken account of all that would come in, and that He has adequate resources in grace and wisdom to meet it all. This is very touching, and is especially encouraging to those who wish to be faithful amidst the weakness and departure of the last days.

Quotations from Scripture are generally, throughout this book, from a well-known New Translation by J. N. Darby which can be obtained from the publishers.

C. A. C.

NUMBERS 1

Numbers 1

The time when Jehovah spoke to Moses about taking "the sum of the whole assembly" is to be noted as indicating the connection in which God would take account of His people for military service. The tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year (Exodus 40:17). The speaking of Jehovah in Leviticus appears to follow immediately on this (Leviticus 1:1). Then Numbers begins with His speaking to Moses "in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt" (verse 1). So that this book assumes that those who take it up are in the light of the teaching of Exodus and Leviticus. It has reference to a people with the knowledge of redemption, and of the covenant, and who are now identified with "the tabernacle of testimony". These are the three great subjects of the book of Exodus. This book also views the people of God as having divine light with regard to approaching God, and as knowing something of the exercises, and also the appreciation of Christ, which have place in that connection, and which are brought out typically in the book of Leviticus. All this is morally antecedent to being taken account of in a militant way as set for the defence of the testimony, or as engaged in levitical service in relation to it, which are the subjects of Numbers 1 - Numbers 10:28. It will be observed that there is hardly any reference to the testimony in Leviticus, though it is mentioned in chapter 16:13 and in chapter 24:3 in connection with the mercy seat and the veil, but it is prominent in Numbers. The testimony has its place in the assembly viewed as in the wilderness.

It is to be noted that only males were numbered, and "from twenty years and upward, all that go forth to military service in Israel" (verses 2,3). This reckoning is "the sum" of those who are strong and can quit themselves like men in spiritual warfare; no account is taken of either women or children. "The whole assembly" is viewed here as composed of those who are full-grown in Christ, and marked by spiritual vigour. The hallowed firstborn males of the children of Israel were numbered from a month old and upward, as also were the males of the Levites, showing that when it is a question of being hallowed through redemption, or of being called to holy service, God takes account of persons from the earliest stage of His work in them. But for military service in relation to His testimony He will only have those numbered who are competent to take it up by reason of being full-grown. So that something more than being a believer, or a redeemed one, is required to give one a place in this numbering. One has, indeed, to declare his pedigree to the satisfaction of Moses and Aaron, and also to the satisfaction of the princes, "the heads of the

thousands of Israel", but in addition to this it must be evident that he is "twenty years old", and able to bear arms. This is not a numbering of the redeemed, or of believers as such, but of those who are competent to take up military service such as might be called for on the part of those who surround and accompany "the tabernacle of testimony".

The last chapter of Leviticus shows that, "from twenty years old even unto sixty years old", is the period of full value. Before that period is reached, or after it has passed, valuation is much lower. What is immature, or declining in strength, has not full value with God. We may gather from this that carnal persons, being but babes in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1 - 3), or those who go back into the babe condition, as some of the Hebrew believers did (Hebrews 5:11 - 14), or as the Galatians did (Galatians 4:9), would not be taken account of in such a "sum of the whole assembly" as is contemplated in Numbers 1. The assembly is viewed here in its competency for military service, and none are numbered in this connection but those who are full grown in Christ, and who can quit themselves like men (1 Corinthians 16:13). Romans calls upon the saints to "put on the armour of light", so that they are seen in that epistle as of military age; they are: able to "overcome evil with good". It is only such as are characterised by the presence in them of the Spirit of God who are competent for military service. A carnal person may be a believer, and may have the Spirit, but he is not characterised for testimony by the Spirit. It is very pertinent to ask, Are we children, or are we really MEN? Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I reasoned as a child; when I became a man, I had done with what belonged to the child". Is that really true of us in a spiritual sense? If not, we are not such as would be numbered by Moses and Aaron and the princes.

Ceasing from warfare is not contemplated in this chapter, nor such decline as would unfit us for it. It is one of the perfections of Scripture that it should be said here repeatedly "from twenty years old and upward" without any mention of an age when exemption would be granted. In relation to "the wars of the Lord" there is no retiring age; we are to be soldiers to the end. Caleb said, "And now behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still this day strong, as in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in" (Joshua 24:10,11). It is not contemplated that we shall become incapacitated for military service.

The importance attached to the numbering in the mind of God may be gathered from the fact that it was not entrusted to any but Moses and Aaron and the twelve princes of the tribes. It was not a mere counting of heads, but, in type, a spiritual discrimination. Moses representing Christ as Lord, sets forth

the rights and authority of God; Aaron typifies Christ as exercising priestly discernment; and the princes represent responsible oversight and leadership in the assembly. It is a high tribunal before which to appear, but it is necessary to stand there in order to be numbered. This is something entirely different from any other census that ever was taken; it indicates how God would have His people numbered according to what they are spiritually as Jehovah's host in the wilderness. It is not here a question of names being written in heaven, but of being taken account of as men competent for spiritual warfare down here. God loves to take definite account of His people, and if we love Him as in the bond of the covenant we shall love to be taken account of by Him.

For that we must be able to stand before Moses; we must be prepared to be tested by the commandments of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 14:37). The principle of subjection to the Lord's authority is a primary qualification, as it will also be the principle by which all who profess to serve Him will ultimately be judged. "Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied through *thy* name, and through *thy* name cast out demons, and through *thy* name done many works of power? And then will I avow unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:22,23). The Lord will not call in question that they have done much in His Name, but He will repudiate them as workers of lawlessness — persons who have been pleasing themselves, and doing their own will all the time. Such persons have never really stood before our Moses to be numbered, and they will ultimately be disowned by Him altogether. If we do not recognise the Lord's authority, if we are not in personal subjection to Him, we cannot be numbered as of Jehovah's host.

Then Aaron represents priestly discernment such as we see exercised by the Lord in Revelation 2, Revelation 3. He takes account of the assemblies in their actual moral state, and in each case He singles out the overcomer for approval and distinction. Only such as have military prowess are taken account of in Numbers 1, and the overcomers alone are seen as having this character under the priestly judgment of the Son of man in Revelation 2, Revelation 3. To be numbered in relation to the testimony under the all discerning eye of Christ as the true Lawgiver and Priest is not a distinction that can be secured without qualifications.

Then "the princes of the tribes of their father, the heads of the thousands of Israel" having their part in the numbering indicates that the spiritual judgment of the brethren, represented by those who take the lead amongst them, has a place which must not be ignored. None are numbered for identification with the testimony save those who establish their claim in presence of those who

have exercise and responsibility in relation to it. There is still that which answers to "the tabernacle of testimony", and it is the only divine rallying centre for the people of God. Our position and movements in the wilderness must all be in relation to it, and according to divine order there are those who have an assigned place answering to that of the twelve men mentioned here as heads of their fathers' houses. Such have to be satisfied before anyone can be numbered according to God. Moses and Aaron — representing the divine side — do not number without the princes, who represent those who take a lead on the people's side.

We cannot be taken account of in relation to the testimony without the recognition of the brethren. If we are truly in subjection to the Lord, and our state will bear His priestly scrutiny, we shall not, shrink from submitting ourselves to the judgment of those who carry responsibility amongst His people; it is essential to fellowship that we should do so. It is our privilege to stand together by the testimony of our Lord, not only as recognised by Him, but also by those who are faithful to Him. It is according to divine principles that one wishing to be identified with the testimony of our Lord should be commended to the saints by responsible brethren who have their confidence. The true character of Christian fellowship as it is available in a day of ruin according to 2 Timothy is not simply that of baptised persons, professed believers, or even true believers, but of those who are identified in heart with the testimony of our Lord. It is, indeed, a privilege to be recognised by the Lord, and also by the brethren, as having that character; and to be taken account of by name as each numbered person was (verses 2,3).

Babes in Christ have their place in the assembly, but they are to be numbered in view of growth so that they may, as come to maturity, form part of the fighting strength of the assembly. 2 Timothy goes on the ground that God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion. Paul there says, "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but suffer evil along with the glad tidings, according to the power of God". He tells Timothy to take his share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and reminds him that a soldier does not entangle himself with the affairs of life. As to himself he could say, "I have combated the good combat". The defence of the testimony is not a matter for babes or weaklings but for *men*, for good soldiers; and the youngest believer who breaks bread should have before him that he is called to be identified with the testimony of the Lord, that he is linked with something quite different from anything that is in the religious world around, and that he is growing up to be a man and a soldier of Jesus Christ.

The earnest longing of the youngest believer should be to be recognised by the Lord, and by the brethren, as having come to maturity in Christ, and as fully identified with the testimony of our Lord. A babe in Christ who walks in the Spirit will soon be a young man; he will be "twenty years old", in a comparatively short time. We may see an example of this in the assembly of the Thessalonians who were but a short time converted; and yet were addressed as soldiers who could put on breastplate and helmet. God does not expect babes to fight; and He graciously considers for them as we see in Exodus 13:17, but when His people had eaten flesh and manna, and drunk of the water from the smitten rock, ability for conflict was developed, so that Moses could say to Joshua, "Choose us men, and go out, fight with Amalek". And as having entered into the covenant, and having the tabernacle in their midst, "the sum of the whole assembly" could be taken as going forth to military service. They are viewed now, typically, as full grown in Christ.

In order to be numbered, it was necessary that they should declare their pedigree (verse 18). They must all prove that they are of Israel. It would not suffice to prove kinship with Abraham; the sons of Lot could do that. Nor would direct descent from Abraham give one a place, otherwise the sons of Ishmael and of Keturah could come in. To be able even to prove descent from Isaac would be unavailing; an Edomite could do that. One must be able to declare his pedigree as of the children of Israel. There is much instruction in this; there are many today who say they are believers, and they may be truly so, but are they on the line of refusing the flesh and what is natural, and recognising only what belongs to the risen Man? Paul said to Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David, according to my glad tidings, in which I suffer even unto bonds as an evildoer" (2 Timothy 2:8,9). Lot was kindred with Abraham, he was a believer, but he was not a separate man; he felt the state of things in Sodom, but he did not separate from it. 2 Timothy calls urgently for separation from iniquity and from vessels to dishonour. A people mixed with the world cannot be in identification with the testimony of our Lord. Then the sons of Ishmael were descended from Abraham; they represent those who look to the flesh as capable of being cultivated under law, or under Christian influence. Paul would tell the Galatians that in going back to law and circumcision they were really taking the place of being descended from Ishmael, but they could not be numbered as having such a genealogy. The sons of Keturah were also of Abraham's house; I take it that they represent believers who give place to the natural — the mind of man and natural ability, such as we see they were in danger of at Colosse. Then the sons of Esau represent those who mind earthly things, and despise the birthright; the Philippians were warned against such. To have a pure

genealogy in a spiritual sense we must be of the line of Isaac and Israel. That is, we see that everything for God is secured in Christ as the risen and heavenly Man, and on our side by God working in sovereignty according to His own purpose and grace given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time. "The elect ... obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory". Israel represents the princely character of those who have learned under discipline their own weakness, but who in dependence prove the power of God. A pedigree that entitles us to be numbered for military service in relation to the testimony must make manifest that we are on the line of Christ as risen, and that we recognise nothing in man but what is the product of the working of God — the outcome of His electing love.

The fellowship of the apostles in which believers persevered at the beginning (Acts 2:42), was clearly a militant fellowship; it was a community of interests to which everything in the world was adverse, as we may learn from Acts 4:23 - 30. It is no light thing to take up a position which is so contrary to all human thoughts that every influence in the world and in the religious profession will be opposed to it. It calls for "military service"; such was, assuredly, the fellowship of Acts 2 and 4. Nor is Christian fellowship less so today on the part of all who take it up. The priests and Levites encamped in an inner circle around "the tabernacle of testimony" in connection with which they served, but the children of Israel who were numbered for military service encamped in an outer circle to defend the tabernacle and those who served it. The public position of saints today is one of military service; we are called to be overcomers; every influence contrary to the truth and testimony of God is to be resisted; not merely protested against and then surrendered to, but resisted to the point of entire separation from it, whatever may be the reproach incurred. This is the outer circle of defence, answering to the tribes as encamped "round about the tent of meeting" (Numbers 2:2). If this defensive position is not maintained with an unbroken front the inner circle of what is levitical and priestly will lie open to attack, and "the charge of the tabernacle of testimony" will be sure to fail, and then what is properly the service of the holy priesthood will be deficient or altogether lacking.

The scripture before us draws a very distinct line between those of the tribes numbered for military service, and the tribe of the Levites as reserved for the direct service of "the tabernacle of testimony" (see verses 44 - 54). There is much instruction in this. We are called to take part in both services, but if we are not vigorous in the first we shall be disqualified for the second. If we are not right in the outer or militant circle we shall not be right in the inner and more spiritual circle of the tabernacle.

We thus have at the end of chapter 1 a very noticeable exception from the general numbering. The tribe of Levi was not to be numbered, nor the sum of them taken from among the children of Israel (verses 47 - 49). They were not called to go forth to military service, but were appointed "over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it" (verse 50). Their service was not the defence of the testimony in a military way, but keeping the charge of it in holy service so that all might be carried on in suitability to God. Theirs was a vigilant care that everything in the service of the tabernacle of testimony should be maintained for God's pleasure.

Their service was thus more distinctly Godward, and it was that death and wrath might not come upon the assembly. This is not a question of meeting assaults of the enemy from without, but of serving in holy things — so that everything in the service shall be agreeable to Him who is served in it, and who is infinitely holy. The children of Israel in general were to encamp "round about the tent of meeting, afar off" (chapter 2:2), but the Levites were to encamp in an inner circle between the tabernacle and the tribes who encircled it "afar off".

All saints are called to the defence of the testimony against hostile attacks to which it may be exposed in an evil world, but they are also called to maintain the testimony as in relation to the holy pleasure of God, and in doing so they render levitical service. It is not that any saints are precluded from being Levites; they may all be wholly for God, and separated to His service in relation to "the tabernacle of testimony", but, viewed as Levites, they are in a nearer and holier place and service than when they are viewed as the children of Israel generally, and numbered for military service. God calls our attention to the marked difference between the two positions by so definitely distinguishing the Levites from the twelve tribes. We are all called to be warriors in the Lord's host, and to stand against infidelity and evil teachings of all kinds, but this is not such a profound and heart-searching exercise, nor does it call for such intense separation or holiness, as seeking to carry out all the service connected with the testimony in such a way that it shall be entirely according to His mind and for His pleasure. It was part of the Levites' work to minister to the assembly, but in Numbers they are chiefly seen, not as ministering to men, but as cleansed and separated to be a wave-offering to Jehovah, to be wholly His and for His service. The direct service of the tabernacle was entrusted to their responsibility, and this in particular relation to its being "the tabernacle of testimony".

There is a wondrous and holy system of things which has been inaugurated, and which has to be maintained for God in the midst of adverse conditions here. The things in which God's glory and pleasure appear, and in relation to which His holy service is to be carried on, are known as matters of testimony. If they were in public display in power, everything that is contrary to them would have to give place to them, but as being introduced as matters of testimony they are a witness on God's part to what is approved of Him in the face of everything that is in the world. Levitical service, as seen in this book, is connected with this divine testimony. It has to be maintained in its true and holy character as corresponding exactly with God's mind, and this is a very hallowed service. "All the vessels thereof" and "all things that belong to it" have to be borne and served, and the charge thereof kept, so that in every detail things are just as God would have them to be. It is not a question of serving men, but of serving God in relation to His own testimony, so that nothing may be falsified or lowered in character, but all maintained in its true and divine perfection. Human or natural influences could have no place in such a service. Hence we read, "the stranger that cometh near shall be put to death" (verse 51). The danger of "wrath" is clearly intimated (verse 53), showing the necessity for an intense degree of separation and of moral purity such as attached typically to the Levites according to chapter 8; but we shall come to the service of the Levites later in the book.

NUMBERS 2

Numbers 2

This chapter gives us instruction as to the encampment and movements of the people of God viewed as in the wilderness, but as being there in relation to "the tent of meeting". It thus regards the saints in their spiritual associations with one another, and in their identification with the divine service and testimony, but in wilderness conditions such as are contemplated in 1 Corinthians.

What is brought out here has an important bearing on how things have to be carried out for God's pleasure in His assembly and particularly with reference to matters which have to be taken up in local responsibility. This would seem to be indicated by the words, "every one by his standard, with the ensign of their father's house" (verse 2). There is a particular place assigned to each, which determines his relations to his neighbours, and to all Israel, and to "the tent of meeting". One cannot disregard with impunity the Lord's appointments in this way. There is no room for individual choice or preference; no option as to *where* we "encamp"; the *place* where we actually take up our relation to "the tent of meeting" is assigned in the providential ordering of God, and has to be accepted. The recognition of this would make it a serious matter to change one's locality without being assured that to do so was in the way of divine ordering. Our most important links are those which we have with the people and testimony of God, and it is well to take them up as recognising that we do so under divine regulation. We are not unattached units with liberty to do as we please. Where we "encamp" is always to have reference to "the tent of meeting"

and it is always to be divinely ordered, so that there is nothing casual or accidental about the way in which we take up our local relations with the brethren.

Everyone is to encamp "by his standard", and the "standard" is connected with the four "camps" rather than with each local tribe. The number *four* stands connected with what is universal — the four camps occupying positions east, south, west and north of "the tent of meeting". The "tribe" would be, in each case, specially local, but no one tribe has a "standard" to itself. The "standard" and the "camp" to which it attached always included two other tribes; a definite testimony that even as viewed in the most local setting they encamped and journeyed as in unity with their brethren. This intimates that it is of God that saints in any locality should preserve close touch with brethren that are geographically adjacent. Fellowship meetings, now happily so

common amongst the brethren, provide an excellent opportunity for this. It is not easy to realise directly in a practical way our universal links, but in recognising those in proximity to us we reach out as far as we are providentially permitted towards the universal fellowship. God would preserve us from being narrowed down to what is purely local. The assemblies are local, but they are never to regard themselves as independent units, or to think that they can either encamp or move according to God without regarding their brethren who are in proximity to them. There should be a moving together, not merely by arrangements or agreements, but as sharing spiritual exercises. Paul encouraged this by saying, "And when the letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the assembly of Laodiceans, and that ye also read that from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). The Lord would have any local exercise to be a concern to neighbouring meetings, and every local prosperity to be a joy correspondingly.

The four "camps" have particular reference to the universal movements of "the tent of meeting" viewed as "the tabernacle of testimony". They move first, second, third and last, but all in relation to what is general and common to the whole twelve tribes. Our touch with the universal movements of the testimony is thus very distinctly connected with our being in close contact with brethren who are in a practical way within our reach. It will be found that those who do not keep rank with brethren who are near at hand are in great danger of losing touch with spiritual movements of a general character.

The lead in spiritual movements is entirely a matter of divine sovereignty; amongst the tribes it was not according to priority of birth, for the camp of Judah "set forth first", and not Reuben the first born. The "camps" would appear to correspond with the "four rows of stones" in the breastplate of the high priest "for the twelve tribes", where each has his place according to the sovereignty of God in the unity of His testimony. Some distinctive feature comes out in each tribe as represented in the twelve different precious stones, but all are held together in unity in their golden setting, and all are borne on Aaron's heart "for a memorial before Jehovah continually". It is a precious thought that each local assembly is borne upon the heart of Christ before God continually. No individual saint is forgotten by Him surely, but the setting of the type is that "tribes" are symbolised in the breastplate rather than individuals. Its strict application would thus be more to assemblies than to individuals, and to the assemblies viewed as having features which correspond with the mind of God as set forth in the precious stones of the breastplate.

The number *twelve* conveys the thought of completeness in administration, so that every feature is included which is necessary to set forth all that is in the

mind of God to bring out in His people. It could not all be developed in one local assembly; the whole of the "tribes" are essential to it, so that the thought of independent assemblies is contrary to the truth. Each assembly has its local place and direct responsibility to the Lord, but has to recognise its unity with all other assemblies universally. Each tribe encamps in its ordered place relative to all the others, and moves in unity with them, and what is set forth in "the tent of meeting" and in "the tabernacle of testimony" is common to them all. In presence of the confusion which prevails today it is only by divine illumination, and by faith, that we come in any practical sense to what is in accord with the mind of God. Then we realise the perfection of divine principles and orderings; they cannot be improved upon, nor can anything that is a matter of divine assembly order be optional; no family or tribe in Israel could encamp or journey independently. They had each to be "with the ensign of their father's house", which would be their strictly local place. Then "everyone" had to encamp, or set forth, by his "standard"; in so doing they were in line with their immediate neighbours. Then "the tent of meeting" and "the camp of the Levites" were "in the midst of the camps" (verse 17), so that every "tribe" and "camp" was regulated by what was universal, or common to them all. The tabernacle and its service were under the charge of the Levites, and every local "tribe" and "camp" stood in relation to it. The service of God in the sanctuary is the same universally, so that in every local assembly the same Lord's supper is eaten, the same thanksgiving and praises and worship have their place, and all ministry in holy things is in spiritual unity the world over.

On the administrative side local exercises have to be faced which are not exactly the same in all localities, but in each case they serve to bring out features essential to divine administration. These local exercises, and the gain which comes through them, are really ordered in divine sovereignty, whatever may be the occasion for them on the human side. This is what gives distinctiveness to the local history of every assembly, and imparts to it a colour peculiarly its own. It is precious to know that the divine end in view in each case is on the heart of our great High Priest above. Each "tribe" is marked on His breastplate by its own colour and value, and it should be our prayer that all our local assembly exercises should develop, through His grace, those features which are spiritually suitable to divine administration. Such features develop through deep exercise and waiting on the Lord, in presence of conditions which are testing, and which call for spiritual wisdom and power to meet them according to God. Many have proved that assembly exercises are more intense than individual exercises, and we cannot wonder at this, for they are intended to develop qualities that are suitable for universal administration in the world to come. They involve the necessity for spiritual discernment of

moral state, as well as sound and sober judgment of facts, and added to these a clear apprehension of the divine principles which apply in any particular case; and this requires the presence of qualities such as are typified in the precious stones of the breastplate. All that is hostile can only be met, and what is of God maintained collectively, as such qualities are present.

It is very comforting to bear in mind that the Lord has us in hand assembly-wise. If each "tribe" had its special and distinctive place in the breastplate, we may be sure that each assembly has such a place. Indeed we know that each assembly is under the Lord's eye in a particular way, for He commanded His servant John to write letters to seven different assemblies; seven being a symbolical number would intimate that these assemblies represented all the assemblies, each having His particular regard. He views them in Revelation 2, Revelation 3 in their responsibility as light-bearers. In Numbers 2 they are viewed typically, as occupying a divinely appointed administrative place, as called to maintain against all that is adverse what is connected with the present testimony; as doing so they answer to the place which they have in the breastplate.

The encamping of the tribes in the order seen in Numbers 2, and all numbered as going forth to "military service" sets forth how the saints, viewed as in local assemblies, but keeping close touch particularly with adjacent assemblies, are seen as maintaining universally, and defending in a military way, what is essential to the testimony of God and to His holy service. There is no gap in the ranks, no breach through which the enemy can make an inroad; east, south, west and north there is a solid front. The tabernacle of testimony, the tent of meeting, the service of the sanctuary, are safeguarded by a militant host; such is the divine thought. No failure that has come in, or that can come in, should be allowed to hinder us from seeing the divine order, or from seeking, so far as is practicable in a day of ruin, to maintain consistency with it. The testimony is just what it ever was; if we are not safeguarding it in unity with the brethren universally we are really deserters from the standard and there is no honour in this.

Our chapter contemplates that the tribes not only encamp, but from time to time they "set forth". This gives us to understand that the testimony will not be stationary, it will change its location, it will be marked by movement. Continual exercise will be called for to note the movements of the cloud, to hear the sound of the trumpet, and to move with our brethren. The movements of the testimony are as real as anything else connected with it. The divine ways in connection with the revival of assembly truth and assembly features have been marked by definite spiritual movements. Movements of

departure always tend to diminish or obscure what is of God; they lead to the giving up of something or other connected with Christ or the assembly. But divine movements always give enlargement and adjustment; they tend to spiritual increase, not to diminution, and this comes into evidence assembly-wise. We are conscious that we view things from a new position, and in a clearer light; the ministry gives evidence of this, the meetings take character from it. Many exercises have had to be passed through, and each one has contributed something, for the movements of the testimony stand in relation to spiritual exercise and soul progress, and not merely to clearer apprehensions. Those who drop out of line at any point cease to benefit by the progress of the testimony, they remain where they were, or retrograde, and even if they desire to resume their place in the ranks they find it difficult, if not impossible, to overtake their brethren who have been moving on with the tabernacle. Things are all viewed now from a changed spiritual position, and those who have not journeyed with the Lord's host find themselves unable to see things as their brethren see them.

The precious things in the tabernacle remain just what they were, but there is such a thing as spiritual movement, or change of spiritual position through onward progress under divine leading; it is not at all the mind of God that His people should settle on their lees in a fixed position. The typical teaching of the book of Numbers makes it very plain that movement is a law of assembly progress, and each stage of that progress brings Jehovah's host to a changed position, and if one has not journeyed with the host to that position he cannot have the outlook that belongs to it. There is not only what is individual, connected with each Israelite's own tent, but there are collective movements which take place under divine leading. The thought of all participating in such a movement, and moving in divine order, is clearly seen in the type, and we may be sure that it has an important place in God's wilderness ways. It has to do with the people of God viewed assembly-wise, and would hardly be understood by those who are on independent ground, or in human systems. It will be found that as the saints continue in exercise before God there is continual enlargement in spiritual apprehension. The true setting of things according to Scripture, and particularly with regard to our walking together as of God's assembly, is more clearly seen, and when seen it calls for adjustment; we have to move to a new position, for the one formerly occupied no longer corresponds with the movements of the cloud. So that if saints say they are just where they were thirty or forty years ago, it either means that the cloud has not moved for forty years, or they have failed to move with it. If the cloud has made several definite movements during that time, and the saints have waited on its movements and have followed them, it is inevitable that those

who have not moved are by this time a long way behind. If we do not understand what it is to move with the testimony it is evident that we have missed a very important feature of God's ways with His people.

The "camps" set forth, and "the tent of meeting", and "the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp"

(verse 17). The whole divinely ordered system participates from time to time in definite movement. The local assemblies move, in concert with their neighbours; the assembling together of the saints, answering to "the tent of meeting" gives evidence of movement; the meetings are not just what they were forty years ago. What is levitical and priestly — the ministry of the word, and the service of God, and all that pertains to the sanctuary is found to have reached a new position spiritually. It is evident that none would really understand such a movement, save those who participate in it; if we ourselves do not move, we shall be out of line and out of touch with those who do. We shall probably find fault with them, and feel justified in doing so, we may even be willing to part company with them as persons who are following a wrong course, when the whole trouble really lies in our own state. If we do not awake to this, through the grace of the Lord, it may be that "the tabernacle of testimony" and the divine cloud will move on and leave us behind, and we shall lose our place and privilege in relation to that which is distinctively of God. The longer we remain out of touch with the movements of the testimony the more difficult we shall find it to be to regain the position we have lost.

NUMBERS 3

Numbers 3

The priests and Levites were expressly excluded from the numbering of the tribes in chapters 1 and 2, that we might learn to clearly distinguish between the saints viewed as in "military service", and the same persons viewed as keeping "the charge of the sanctuary", or as performing the service of "the tent of meeting". We find the latter in the chapter now before us, and the priests are mentioned first because the Levites were given to them, and had to serve in every detail under their authority. The sons of Aaron were also themselves under commandment, and held their office in virtue of being so; their names are introduced as "the generations of Aaron and Moses" (verse 1). This would seem to convey that Aaron's sons were required to be, in a moral sense, true sons of Moses also. They could only be in right relation to Aaron in the priesthood by being in right relation to Moses as the representative of divine authority. It was in this that the two eldest so signally failed, and thereby forfeited the priesthood and their lives. They died before Jehovah because they "presented strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them" (Leviticus 10:1). To take up priesthood without subjection to Christ as Lord is disastrous.

The death of Nadab and Abihu being spoken of here, and priesthood being exercised by Eleazar and Ithamar in the presence of Aaron (verse 4), has undoubtedly a bearing on present conditions. The priesthood has publicly come to grief, but there is a remnant left who are enabled with humble and chastened spirits to carry on priestly service in the presence of Christ. It is as conscious that this is the position of things today that we can profit by the instruction of Numbers. The system of holy things with which we have to do is altogether divine and spiritual; we can only serve in relation to it as being spiritual ourselves; and we serve with a humbling sense that what has had the prominent place in a public way has entirely broken down, and become a subject of divine judgment.

But the exercise of priesthood continues, not only on the part of Christ as the true Aaron, but on the part of those who are, antitypically, Aaron's sons. Priesthood represents the highest spirituality, and most mature understanding of God's holy things, and of what is suitable to God, and that element is to direct all the service of "the tribe of Levi". So Moses is told to "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 assembly, before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle"

(verses 6,7). "And thou shalt give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons" (verse 9). The saints as typified in "the tribe of Levi" have a place and service which is more spiritual and holy than that which they fill as of the twelve tribes, but which does not reach to the high rank of priesthood. As Levites they are given to the priests, to be directed by them in every detail of their service. A Levite who does not act under priestly direction is entirely out of order. God would impress us all with the great truth that the levitical is subordinate to the priestly; if we do not recognise this we shall never find our right place in the divine system of holy service. Levitical service as seen in this book, is "the service of the tabernacle"; it is well that we should apprehend what this means.

The tabernacle was, as Hebrews 8:5 and Hebrews 9:23 tell us, "the representation and shadow of heavenly things", "the figurative representations of the things in the heavens". It "represented the vast scene in which God's glory is displayed in Christ" (see note to Hebrews 9:1 in J.N.D.'s translation). As Levites we are brought near to God, "to do the work of the tabernacle of Jehovah, and to stand before the assembly to minister to them" (Numbers 16:9). Not a single detail in the tabernacle would have suggested itself to the mind of man if God had not made it known; all was to be made "according to the pattern which has been shown to thee in the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5). As Levites we are called to serve in relation to a system which is heavenly in character, and in which we can only serve rightly as we are directed by Christ as the true Aaron, and by His sons as typical of that which is highly spiritual in the saints.

Then we learn from verses 11 - 13 that the Levites were taken instead of all the hallowed firstborn in Israel. They thus typify the saints as composing "the assembly of the firstborn who are enregistered in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23), having no earthly inheritance, but having a heavenly place and service. "Every male from a month old and upward" was to be numbered (verses 14 - 16). When it is a question of "military service" the numbering is "from twenty years old and upward", but when the saints are viewed as hallowed to God through the redemption value of the blood of Christ they are taken account of by the Lord (note that it is only Moses and Aaron who number the Levites) long before they can take account of themselves. Indeed, one could say, "God who set me apart even from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" (Galatians 1:15), and of the same one the Lord could say when he was only three days converted, "this man is an elect vessel to me" (Acts 9:15). We may see from this that levitical service is a matter of divine sovereignty, and that what we are called to be as Levites is in view from the earliest period of our history. It is usually the case that there are early indications of an appointment

to service; Timothy was clearly marked out by "prophecies as to thee preceding" (1 Timothy 1:18). The Levite was not matured as a servant until he was thirty years old, but all that he would be was in prospect from the beginning. What an impression would be made upon us if we understood that from the very outset of God's ways with us we were hallowed for His holy service! Satan will no doubt do what is possible to mar us for that service, both before conversion and after, but all God's ways ever tend to bring us to maturity for our appointed place and charge in relation to His holy things.

We learn next (verses 17 - 39) that the tribe of Levi consisted of three families, from one of which Aaron and his sons were taken and consecrated as priests, so that they along with Moses, occupied a special place "before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrising". The three families, apart from the priests, respectively encamped westward, southward, and northward of the tabernacle. So that the priestly and levitical encampings are seen to stand in relation to the tabernacle on all four sides, indicating the universality of priestly and levitical service. Levi means "united", and no family of his sons served independently of the other families, nor were any or all of them to serve apart from the priests who appointed them "every one to his service and to his burden" (chapter 4:19). In the divinely ordered system there are no gaps and no overlapping; every needed service is adequately provided for, and though there is great variety in the nature of the service it constitutes one whole, all directed in spiritual intelligence and contributing to a complete result. Each Levite would be conscious that he was doing something that was necessary to further the whole tabernacle system and its service. However small his bit might be, he would do it as having the universal thought before him, and as realising that he was one with all his brethren in the service.

This chapter gives us to understand that there are distinct branches of levitical service. Not only do the three families encamp on three different sides of the tabernacle, but their respective services are graded, all tabernacle service is not alike; some parts of it demand greater spirituality, more personal holiness, than others. To carry a peg or a cord of the court is not so holy a service as to carry the candlestick or the golden altar. A Gershonite or a Merarite must not take up "the charge of the sanctuary"; that is reserved to the family of Kohath. So that, even as Levites, we have to learn what family we are of, and to what part of the divine system we can put our hand under priestly direction.

The Gershonites encamped "behind the tabernacle westward", and their service was connected with all the woven and embroidered work (save the veil), and the cords of the tabernacle and the tent, and with its coverings and

the hangings of the court. This branch of the service is thus seen to be connected with what takes form in the saints collectively through much exercise in detail. It is the outcome of spinning, weaving, needlework, all of which speak of patient and protracted labour to which one detail is added after another until the work is complete. All this was not exactly the work of Bezaleel and Aholiab, but work done under their teaching by "every woman that was wise-hearted" (Exodus 35:25). It represents the fruit of subjective exercise, which, having been worked out to completion through spiritual affections, now comes under the charge of the Gershonites. They were not called upon to make the things, but to carry out a charge with reference to them after they were made. They have all to be *carried* through the wilderness, and this is the chief service of the Levites as seen in Numbers. It has to do with the continuance of things, and the movements of the testimony rather than with what is initial. No feature of the testimony is to be lost or left behind; every detail of it is to be carried on, however many different encampments there may be. Whatever spiritual features were developed in the saints under divine teaching at the beginning are to be carried right through. It is the charge of the Gershonites to see to this.

The things mentioned as constituting "the charge of the sanctuary", and committed to the care of the families of the Kohathites — the ark, the table, the candlestick, the altar, the veil — were all directly typical of Christ personally, and hence we can understand that the service of the Kohathites was "most holy" (chapter 4:4). The detail of it will come before us in chapter 4. Every spiritual apprehension of Christ which was given to the apostles and others at the beginning, and communicated by them to the saints in Spirit-taught words, has to be carried through by levitical service in such wise that it suffers no loss or damage. It is of vital importance that what we have heard from the beginning should abide in us; and the thought conveyed in the carrying of the holy things would seem to be that what they typify is preserved intact amongst the people of God, and carried through as the subject of testimony. This is not the direct service of God in the way of prayer, praise or worship; that would be priests' work; but this levitical service is to carry through everything that forms part of the testimony of God in such wise that it remains in its full original character amongst the people of God, and they remain fully identified with it. The very service supposes that the testimony will move, but it moves without losing one feature that had a place in it at the beginning. We know, alas! how great the failure has been as to this. The levitical service has broken down publicly as well as the priesthood, but the testimony remains what it was at the beginning, and true levitical service is just the same today as it was at the beginning, and true priesthood likewise.

We have to return in our faith and affections to God's order, and to seek to be consistent with it, notwithstanding all the public departure from it.

Then the families of Merari had "oversight of the boards of the tabernacle, and its bars, and its pillars, and its bases ... and the pillars of the court round about" etc. Their part had to do with what we might describe as *structural* — typifying the firm and stable character which attaches to saints as being God's workmanship, God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 2:10,22; 1 Peter 2:5; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:5,17). It is most necessary that we should have in mind the substantial nature — of course in a moral sense — of the work of God as made good in His saints. One who is born of water and of the Spirit has become, morally, new material; the "inward man" is a substantive reality. And it is said of the "new man" that he is created after God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. What men are as born of God, or as created in Christ, corresponds morally with Christ, just as the wood of the boards and pillars, etc., corresponded with the wood of the ark. The carrying through of all that is connected with this important, and indeed (so far as man is concerned) very fundamental aspect of the truth, is in the charge of the Merarites.

It will be seen that, according to the type, there can be no movement of the testimony apart from the activity of all three branches of levitical service. The priests take the lead, and the Levites do nothing save under their direction, but the service of each family is essential to every movement. To preserve intact the features of the testimony, the ministry of Christ personally must have the first and "most holy" place; but it is to be accompanied by the carrying forward also of all that is connected with the normal activity of holy exercises and affections in the saints, and of spiritual diligence. And there must also be full place given to what the saints are morally by the work of God. It is the priest's responsibility to see that all is carried out suitably, and that no detail is overlooked or handled amiss. The priests represent the saints viewed as filling in holy dignity and intelligence the place which Christ has given them before His God and Father; in this character they are viewed as having the greatest nearness to God, the highest degree of spirituality. All levitical service is to be controlled and directed by that element.

So Moses and Aaron and his sons encamped "before the tabernacle eastward", and they kept "the charge of the sanctuary, for the charge of the children of Israel" (verse 38). We see from this that the priests served representatively on behalf of the whole assembly. They are not to be regarded as typifying a separate class of persons, but as representing certain spiritual features to which God would assign the most prominent place in relation to His testimony;

everything levitical had to be subordinated to what was priestly. This is a lesson which is most important to be learned, and submitted to, by all who take up any kind of levitical service. The instruction of all this is for us who are called to serve in the last days; it could not possibly be understood by those who lived in Moses' time.

The last section of the chapter (verses 40 - 51) shows how the Levites were taken instead of all the firstborn males of the children of Israel, those in excess of the number of the Levites being ransomed by the payment of "five shekels apiece". So that the Levites were in the place of all that was hallowed to Jehovah in Israel, the whole assembly in that particular aspect being seen representatively in them. Every redeemed one should realise that he is a "firstborn", and that he is hallowed for God, and that such service is due from him as was typified in the tribe of Levi: If any of the "firstborn" were not personally represented in levitical service they had to be ransomed; not only had the divine claim to be recognised, but also the value in God's account of what He claimed. The ransom price is particularly detailed — "five shekels apiece by the poll, according to the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take them, twenty gerahs the shekel" (verse 47). This represents, as we learn from Leviticus 27:6, the value of a male child devoted to Jehovah whose age is from "a month old even unto five years old". So that the ransomed firstborn is regarded as being within those age limits; he is a servant potentially rather than in capability; but as a subject of divine grace, and as having redemption in Christ — and the five shekels speak of this — he has definite value in view of tabernacle service. How good would it be if every redeemed one recognised this, and viewed himself not only as a firstborn son, but also as hallowed for levitical service. The type of the hallowed firstborn runs thus into that of the tribe of Levi, so that no redeemed one can evade responsibility to take up levitical service.

The fact that there were more firstborn males in Israel than there were numbered Levites would perhaps suggest that in a practical sense more persons are hallowed to God through redemption than are found in the definite place of being numbered for levitical service. The disparity in the numbers would probably be very great at the present time, but God requires that the obligation shall be owned, the ransom given. If you are a redeemed "firstborn" you are hallowed to God. If you have no counterpart as a Levite — that is, if you have never recognised your obligation to serve in relation to holy things — you have to consider the question of ransom. However young you are, however immature or unintelligent, God would impress upon you that you have definite value for His holy service. Now what is your value for levitical service?

"Five shekels ... according to the shekel of the sanctuary". Think of the value God puts upon you as one hallowed for His service! You have fivefold sanctuary value, and each of the five shekels is, as it were, drawn out in the full detail of its worth as comprising "twenty gerahs". It seems designed to impress the youngest believer with his value in God's estimation in view of the service that is due from him, even though he may be, as yet, too young to take it up in any practical way. In a babe only "a month old" there is a potentiality that is worth a hundred gerahs in the sanctuary. If such is God's estimate of your value for His holy service, when you are as yet only "one month old", when He may have to wait a long time before you are mature for that service, does it not encourage you to cherish the thought that you are already valued by Him as hallowed for His service? God would give every young believer, even though he may never have thought seriously of taking up any service in relation to the tabernacle of testimony, a distinct impression that he has sanctuary value. Perhaps, there are old believers, too, who need to learn the lesson of the "five shekels"! If we really wake up to the value which God puts upon us in relation to levitical service it would move us to desire to be of the tribe of Levi! And we are not debarred from this; it is but another aspect of our place and calling through grace. If I am a hallowed firstborn, it is through infinite grace, and the same grace entitles me to be of the assembly of the firstborn ones, which answers to the tribe of Levi: But if I am of that tribe I must recognise the character of the service in which I am called to have part. I must seek to learn, under priestly instruction, what to do, and how to do it. The next chapter gives us the service in detail.

NUMBERS 4

Numbers 4

The numbering of the Levites in chapter 3 is "from a month old". It takes account of what is there potentially as well as of what is immediately available for service. But in the chapter before us now the numbering is "from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, all that enter into the service, to do the work in the tent of meeting". The service contemplated requires full maturity and competency; it is too holy and important to be entrusted to babes or novices. Though the Levites might "come to labour in the work of the service of the tent of meeting" from twenty-five years old (Numbers 8:24), they did not serve in carrying the tabernacle and its furniture until thirty years old. They had, if we may so say, to serve a five years' apprenticeship in relation to holy things before they were qualified to render the service of which chapter 4 speaks. We must not suppose that a desire or readiness to serve on our part will give spiritual competency, This must be divinely given, and it will be normally in keeping with the spiritual maturity of the servant. A babe in Christ might be fresh in his affections, and fervent in spirit, but something more than this is needed for service of a high order spiritually. The more spiritual any service is the more does it require spiritual maturity in the one who renders it.

In the early chapters of Numbers things are set out according to the mind of God, so that we may be exercised to come up to the divine standard in that measure of service which is allotted to us. I hope that we all accept that, as God's redeemed firstborn ones, we are hallowed to Him for service in relation to His holy things. In the tribe of Levi, as taken instead of all the firstborn of Israel, we see set forth typically the service for which we are hallowed. It is now for us to be concerned about the maturity and competency which will qualify us to take it up in a practical way. "Desire earnestly the greater gifts" would, in principle, show that we should desire to take up the greatest service that is within reach. And we notice here that God puts the most holy service first; it is His way to begin with the best. In God's system things work from the top down. I do not say that we begin that way, but we have to learn that that is the divine way. It is only one who is a good priest who will make a good Levite, and such a one will also be very good for military service.

We might well covet to be true "sons of Kohath", for theirs was the most holy service in the wilderness; the moving forward of the testimony depended on its being faithfully carried out. The things which they bore on their shoulders are described in Exodus (see "An Outline of Exodus"); they all spoke typically

of Christ in different ways, and when the tabernacle was set up and in function priestly service went on in relation to them. But in the chapter now before us another kind of service is in view, which has place "when the camp setteth forward" (verses 6, 16). In a certain sense the tabernacle is set up for holy service Godward when the saints come together in assembly. But we do not remain together, and the intervals between our comings together provide the opportunity for the carrying service of which this chapter speaks. It represents a service in wilderness conditions, apart from which there will be no *setting forward*. All that composes the furniture of the sanctuary has to be carried in responsible levitical service. This is a "most holy" matter; it is a divine charge committed in sovereignty to persons who are spiritually competent to bear it. Perhaps few of us feel that we are sufficient for such a service. One much greater spiritually than we are asked the question, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But if we see the service to be essential to the carrying forward of God's testimony we shall pray much that there may be God-given sufficiency for it. It is in God's plan that His holy things shall be so carried, and each Kohathite is called upon to put his shoulder to the work, and to bear personally his part of the burden.

But not one of the holy things can be taken up by the Levites until it has been prepared in a priestly way by being covered. We must not gather from this that, in its application to us, the priest is one person and the Levite another. It is intended to teach us that priestly exercise must precede Kohathite service. The priests are seen here as having intelligence as to what is requisite, and as furnished with ability to provide it. This can only be found with persons who habitually "come near to Jehovah" (Exodus 19:22). It is disastrous to attempt to handle holy things apart from spiritual state and priestly exercise. For not even a Kohathite — other than Aaron and his sons — could "see for a moment the holy things, lest they die" (verse 20). The covering of the holy things, which has such prominence in this chapter, is entirely priestly work. It shows that before those things can be carried levitically they need to be accompanied by certain features which, like the coverings of the tabernacle, have a protective character. Such features are not needed in the sanctuary, but they are essential to the suitable carrying of the holy things in a levitical way. The precious things of God, as carried in responsible service here, will suffer injury if they are not accompanied by conditions which are the outcome of priestly exercise. Such conditions are to be inseparable from them during the whole time of levitical carrying.

"The ark of testimony" was the first, and the most important, of the holy things. It speaks of Christ as the One in whom God has made good everything that is at the present time the subject of testimony. God's will is to prevail in

the universe, and in Christ it has prevailed in the fullest possible way. But in view of the ark being carried it had to be covered by "the veil of covering". Two most precious and wondrous types of Christ were thus brought into conjunction; one acted as a covering for the other. This intimates that while what is to be carried is the full and glorious testimony of God in Christ it must be realised that the manner of its presentation here was in the flesh of a lowly and humbled Christ. In the carrying of the testimony that is the first thing to be borne in mind. It must be carried in consistency with all that marked the flesh of Christ — a lowly Man bearing reproach and going on to the cross.

I believe Paul was a priest who knew how to cover the Ark with the veil. He had in an earthen vessel the treasure of all that was glorious, but in carrying that treasure levitically his great exercise was that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his body. That was the form which the testimony would take in a hostile world. And I take it that the Apostle's exercise as to this would answer to the badgers' skin, which is not here, as in other cases, the most outward covering, but is put immediately in contact with the veil. I take it that the protection of the testimony lies in the inward exercises which go along with it. There are holy exercises within, such as we see in Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, and these result in the "cloth wholly of blue" coming into view outwardly. As the Kohathites carry the Ark there is seen moving through the wilderness something which is wholly heavenly in character. As priests they have contemplated the Ark of the testimony, and have known how to cover it suitably, but as Kohathites they carry it as covered, and in such a way that the heavenly comes into view. This service is "most holy". Would to God that it were more in evidence!

Then "the table of shewbread" has also to be carried. It typifies Christ as sustaining the saints before God according to His pleasure. "The continual bread" represents the saints as identified with Christ, and as having Christ identified with them; that is, they are viewed collectively as those in whom the will of God has taken effect. The vessels of service which were carried on the table also represent the saints as secured for the holy service of God. But it is specially noticeable in this type that the "cloth of blue" is spread on the table before the vessels or the shewbread are placed upon it. All that is sustained on the table is put on a heavenly basis. So that it conveys a spiritual conception which belongs to the present period. Indeed, I believe the carrying service set forth in this chapter is one which specially pertains to saints of the assembly, and that it refers to how a heavenly testimony is carried at the present time. The "continual bread" is an unchanging expression of the divine thought, and in the vessels on the table we see how saints are fitted to take up varied forms of ministry to God for His pleasure. They had reference, in a

typical way, to the diversified service of God as it is now carried on in the holy place, all seen to be on a heavenly basis. The saints, as typified by the shewbread and the vessels of service, cannot, therefore, have any place morally in the course of this world. They are reserved for divine pleasure as partakers of heavenly calling.

It is evident that those who serve levitically in relation to such matters will only discredit them if they have not something of heavenly character themselves. I understand the coverings to represent conditions which have to accompany the holy things while they are being carried, and unless these conditions are maintained in the saints there will be no true levitical carrying. The "cloth of blue" — so repeatedly mentioned in this chapter — is of great importance in this connection, and especially at a time when the enemy is doing all that he can to bring the people of God down to the level of "them that dwell upon the earth". It is obvious that what is heavenly is of small account today in the religious world. A prominent man lately thanked God publicly that the thought of another world had been practically swept out of the churches! We are in the presence of a profession which is ready to give up, publicly and boastfully, what is heavenly as being altogether out of date! But the system which God is maintaining stands in relation to a heavenly Christ, and "such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones".

Then, further, "they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet" (verse 8). It has been said that scarlet represents human glory, but as seen here it is evidently such glory as has divine value. In carrying the holy things features of true glory must appear. The glory of the world, or of man as in the flesh, can have no place in this. It is said of some that "they loved glory from men rather than glory from God" (John 12:43). But such glory as that could never come into association with the "blue". We see the scarlet without the blue in Revelation 17, and that is apostasy; but with the blue as a basis we can have the scarlet as setting forth a glory which is given of God, and which is spiritual in character. We ought to covet to have distinction from God. Paul speaks of one member of the body being glorified, and all the members rejoicing with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). It is a true distinction to serve amongst the brethren, but such service has to be safeguarded by a practical walk which is in keeping with it. The "scarlet" is not for display before men; it is covered by badgers' skin, which typifies the watchful vigilance which goes along with practical holiness. There must be jealous care that all movements in the wilderness, and particularly movements in service, shall be in keeping with "the holy things". The Kohathites are to traverse the wilderness as custodians of all that is most precious. When the saints come together in assembly the spiritual order is seen and in function; but we are not always directly ministering to God as

priests; there is another service in carrying "the holy things" through the wilderness in such wise that they sustain no damage or diminution. The tone and character of what takes place "in assembly" depends on how the levitical service has been performed. Any lack of holy care in the carrying service is sure to have its effect when the tabernacle is set up again.

All that the priests see within, and in relation to which they serve, has to be carried through the wilderness under holy protective coverings until the time comes for priestly service in the holy place again. In the case of "the candlestick of the light", and all the vessels connected with its service, and the golden altar, and the "instruments of service, wherewith they serve in the sanctuary", the "cloth of blue" is within. It typifies an inward apprehension of the true character of all spiritual light and service. Christianity is a system of heavenly things and heavenly service; it does not contribute to the world, or to men as in the flesh. And whatever holy service engages us within is to have what corresponds with it, and preserves its holy character, in public levitical service. As Kohathites the saints preserve a character in public service which is in keeping with what they do as priests within. "The holy things" are to be protected and supported in the wilderness movements of the saints in such a careful way that when the time comes they can pass from levitical carrying to priestly service without delay. Every exercised saint must admit that the instruction of all this is of the deepest importance and value.

Finally, the altar is prepared for carrying by being cleansed of the ashes, and by a purple cloth being spread thereon. The purple cloth indicates priestly intelligence that glory is secured on a basis of suffering. Peter puts the purple cloth upon the altar when he speaks of the prophets "testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ; and the glories after these" (1 Peter 1:11). The Kohathites carrying the altar indicates that the saints are to preserve in their walk and service here consistency with the suffering character in which they know the Lord Jesus, but they do so in the full consciousness that corresponding glories will follow. All the mind of God in Christ, and as secured in the saints through Christ, is entrusted to levitical care that it may be carried in suffering service through the wilderness until the time comes for it to be manifested in glory. It is the testimony of something which is contrary to all the thoughts of men, and which has been secured through the sufferings of Christ.

All this involves spiritual movement. Let us challenge our hearts as to whether we are available for the furtherance of spiritual movements. Every movement of the testimony would emphasise the instruction of this chapter. It would tend to make more precious everything connected with Christ as the Ark, the Table,

the Candlestick, the two altars. It would give increased prominence to divine and heavenly features. It would give an ever-deepening sense of the holiness of every detail that enters into the service of God. The saints, as sons of Kohath, are to be marked by identification with the holy things, not in sanctuary service Godward, but in their responsible service and walk in the wilderness. In such a service faithfulness will be put to the test at every step, but if all are true to the charge it, will directly contribute to sanctuary service when we come together. We shall have "set forth" so as to be found in a new spiritual location. The carrying service has in view this important result, and as it is faithfully carried out freshness will be preserved in the sanctuary service. It will be taken up in a new spiritual setting in which it was never found before. It is not that the holy things change in the slightest degree, but as the saints move spiritually in levitical service in relation to them they arrive from time to time at new standpoints. As a result the priestly service is not exactly where it was at the last setting up of the tabernacle. Spiritual progress has been made through divine leading, and through faithful levitical carrying. What a contrast is this from the fixed and formal character of what is often called "divine service" in the religious world!

The carrying service of the sons of Kohath has to do with "the most holy things", but it does not include all that has to be carried. The sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari have also their part, which is of essential importance, even though it be of a lower grade than that of the sons of Kohath. Their service has to do with the tabernacle itself rather than with what is enshrined in it. The curtains and hangings, as well as the boards which support them, have reference to "the true tabernacle, which the Lord has pitched and not man". They typify what is made good in the saints by the grace and working of God so that they constitute a suitable housing for "the holy things".

In connection with the curtains and hangings which the sons of Gershon had to carry we may remember that "every woman that was wise-hearted spun with her hands, and brought what she had spun ... and all the women whose heart moved them in wisdom spun goats' hair" (Exodus 35:25,26). So that the curtains have as their basis a work wrought in wisdom by women, and they represent the saints as formed spiritually by subjective exercises. Every feature set forth typically in the different curtains and coverings of the tabernacle has to take form in the saints through intelligent exercise. As we ponder the epistles we may perceive how excellent and diversified those features are. But not one of them comes into evidence apart from the activity of the Spirit of Christ, or apart from the personal and prayerful exercises of those who have that Spirit. And all those features are essential to the true tabernacle; not one could be dispensed with as unimportant. They are all necessary if the

tabernacle is to have its proper character as enshrining "the holy things". They all have their place in relation to the testimony, and, like the holy things, they have to be carried through the wilderness. There is no spiritual exercise or formation that has not to be taken up as a matter of levitical service.

It must be borne in mind that in the type before us the saints are viewed as forming "one tabernacle"; it speaks of what we are as brought into unity by exercises in which all have part. The unity of saints was never intended by God to be a hidden thing. It was to be manifested at all times, and not only when we come together. Our every movement in the wilderness should bring into evidence that we are of that company in whom spiritual exercises are being worked out. Each curtain and hanging carried by the sons of Gershon had been perfected through skilful labour. The Apostle said to the Corinthian assembly, "But this also we pray for, *your perfecting*". And to this he added the exhortation, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice; *be perfected*; be encouraged; be of one mind; be at peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:9 - 11). This word — perfecting or perfected — is used in Matthew 4:21, Mark 1:19 for *mending* nets, suggesting their being restored to proper efficiency in every detail. All levitical service has the complete divine idea in view, and the thought of it coming into manifestation in a practical way in the saints. It is a matter to be maintained, so far as grace is given for it, in all our responsible service. If we think of all that the saints are as of the assembly of God, the temple, the body, the anointed vessel of divine pleasure here, what incessant labour of love is called for that all this may be worked out in a practical way! The work of the Lord, as entrusted to His Levites, would always tend to secure this; the complete thought is carried as a burden with a view to it being maintained in a real and responsible way. The saints are to be perfected through service rendered to them, and through spiritual exercises promoted by that service, so that they may walk together in unity as knit together in love. It is evident that this means labour; things have to be *carried*; and those who serve must be seen to be personally identified with what they carry. The Gershonite service is to carry forward every divine thought set forth in the curtains and coverings and hangings. Those thoughts are to be carried through the wilderness in testimony and manner of life; they are to be the subjects of responsible service in everyday life. It is by such service that what marked the work of God originally is carried on, and not allowed to drop out or be damaged.

The appointed burden of the sons of Merari is to carry the boards, bars, pillars, bases, etc., of the tabernacle. Their service relates to what is necessary for the support of the tabernacle and its coverings. There must be something foundational as the moral support of all that is in the mind of God concerning

His saints as "the true tabernacle". This refers typically to what the saints are as established in grace according to the epistle to the Romans. It is essential to the testimony that this shall be carried forward, and the bearing of it is an arduous part of levitical service. Like all other parts of the carrying service it involves not only the maintenance of things in teaching, but in manner of life. And no Levite will carry fundamental parts of the truth properly unless he recognises that they are to be held in relation to all that is in the mind of God. Every base and board and bar is an integral part of the whole structure. No Levite in carrying would ever forget this; the divine value of each part would lie in the fact that it was essential to the completeness of the whole. This was as true of every peg and cord as it was of the larger parts; nothing was insignificant. The saints are established by God according to Romans that they may be set together in a definite way in relation to all other saints. This comes out very clearly in chapter 12 of Romans and in chapters 12 to 15 we see the practical effect of the truth as it would come out in the conditions of wilderness life. The truth, as made good in the saints, is to be carried through the wilderness in a suitable manner; so that it is not permitted to suffer defilement or damage. There is something analogous to this also in Colossians and Ephesians. Great spiritual realities are set before us, and then, in the latter part of each epistle, those realities are shown to bear on every detail of practical life here. We may be sure of this, that if the service of the Levites is not faithfully carried out the spiritual realities will wane in our souls; we shall not really have part in the forward movements of the testimony; and what professes to be sanctuary service will lose its divine value and freshness.

In this service each one has his appointed burden; "by name ye shall number to them the materials which are their charge to carry" (verse 32). All is under priestly direction, down to the smallest detail (see verses 19,28,33). The priest represents spiritual intelligence and nearness to God, and all levitical service has to be subordinate to what is priestly. Under such direction there will be no clashing of one service with another, no trying to do another's work, no omission of anything which is essential to the carrying forward of the testimony. It is for each one to carry faithfully what is entrusted to him, and to cooperate with all the others, as realising that the service is one, however many hands may be put to it.

And it is noticeable how ample is the provision for the service! The tabernacle itself was something less than twenty yards in length; its surrounding court measured not more than about sixty yards in length. But eight thousand five hundred and eighty Levites were enrolled to carry the structure in its various parts! It is certain that none of them would be overworked! It is not the Lord's way to "bind burdens heavy and hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders

of men" (Matthew 23:4). He said rather, "my burden is light", (Matthew 11:30). We may be sure that if each Levite were faithfully and diligently discharging his appointed service, no one would be pressed above measure or beyond strength. But if one could think of nine-tenths of the tribe abandoning their service, what a burden would be thrown upon the faithful tenth! It is probably something like that today. Indeed, the whole state of things today in that which professes to be for God is the result of the absence of priestly state and exercise, and the consequent disorganisation of all that is levitical. But, as we have said before, we do not get a picture of human failure in Numbers 4, but of an order of service which is altogether according to the mind of God.

NUMBERS 5

Numbers 5

The encamping of the children of Israel having been ordered in relation to the tent of meeting, and the service of the Levites appointed, we now learn that God dwells in the midst of the camps. This necessitates undefiled conditions, for if God dwells in the midst of His people their condition and their associations must be suitable to Him. So we read, "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by a dead person". To put such out of the camp was not left to the priests or Levites; it was the solemn responsibility of all "the children of Israel". And we are told, "the children of Israel did so" (verse 4); there was no hesitation in carrying out the divine command. They realised at that moment that God dwelt in their midst, and that all must be suitable to Him.

The leper had a deep-seated, constitutional disease which was typical of sin as the principle of lawlessness actively working in the flesh. One characterised by the activity of self-will is a moral leper. Such could have no place in a system which is ordered in every detail in accordance with the will of God. The principle of self-will is unclean, wherever it may be found, but it is never so manifestly unclean as when it is found asserting itself in the sphere of divine things. It is to be absolutely refused a footing there.

Then one with an issue would represent one who may desire to restrain manifestations of the flesh, but is unable to do so. He has no power to exercise self-control. The typical import of leprosy and an issue or flux has been noticed in considering Leviticus 13 - Leviticus 15. (see "Outline of Leviticus".) But it will be observed that one who has an issue is now to be excluded from the camp as well as the leper. The commandment is more stringent than in Leviticus. There is instruction in this. Between Leviticus 15 and Numbers 5 the camp had been ordered according to the mind of God, and this brought in a new standard of holy requirement. Before things are set in order God may bear with a good deal that is not in conformity with His pleasure, but when He has given light as to His mind about things a new and divine standard is set up. God has allowed much to pass in the Christian profession, where divine order is really unknown, that He would regard very seriously if it took place amongst those who know His will. Increased light as to divine assembly order carries with it increased responsibility to maintain conditions such as are suitable to the place where God dwells.

A great restraint would be put upon self-will, and upon manifestations of the flesh, if we bore in mind that these things are unsuitable to the place where God dwells; they cannot be allowed any place there. God would have us to apply this in the way of self-judgment, the whole assembly being cleared by each one refusing these elements in himself. This is the thought of purging out the old leaven in 1 Corinthians 5.

Wicked persons are not to be retained in the fellowship of God's people; but purging out the old leaven means that the whole assembly clears itself, by self-judgment, of that which works in the flesh. Each one has to see that the purging is carried on in himself, so that the assembly may be practically unleavened.

"And whosoever is defiled by a dead person" was also to be "put out of the camp". There is more reference to being defiled by the dead in this book than in any other. The Nazarite defiled the head of his consecration if he touched a dead body (chapter 6); those unclean through the dead body of a man could not eat the passover (chapter 9); any Israelite who did not purify himself after contact with one dead defiled the tabernacle of Jehovah (chapter 19). In each case it is "the dead body of *a man*" that defiles, not the carcase of an animal, showing that it is not death in itself that defiles, but man as being in that state. To touch a dead body would typify coming into moral contact with that in man which has no vitality Godward. There is an immense amount of this in the Christian profession, as it is said of Sardis, "thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead" (Revelation 3:1), but such a state is defiling to the people of God who touch it. There is something actively offensive in the leper, and in the one with an issue; they represent the flesh in a wilful or unrestrained form. But the defilement which comes of contact with a dead person is more negative; it represents the effect on a living person of touching — or coming under the influence of — that which has no vitality Godward. Such is the flesh at its best estate. If man, as according to the flesh, yields nothing for God, to give that man any place in a religious way is to bring in what is essentially unclean. And if God dwells in the midst of His people, as He surely does, He cannot tolerate among them a defilement of this kind. What is of the flesh, even in a religious way, is unresponsive to God; it cannot be otherwise than defiling. We shall learn later in this book how one who has been thus defiled can be purified so as to be in the camp without defiling either it or the tabernacle where God dwells. But here the instruction is that God dwelling in the midst of His people necessitates that there must be no defilement in their camps.

Another section of the chapter follows which provides for things being adjusted that may have been wrong amongst God's people. Any trespass against a brother is really "unfaithfulness against Jehovah" (verse 6), and it is to be confessed and recompense made. Only thus can God's people move together through the wilderness in faithfulness to Him as dwelling in their midst. The trespass being recompensed to Jehovah (verse 8) shows that any trespass against a brother is really an infringement of the rights of God, for which He requires to be recompensed even if there are no means of finding the brother trespassed against or his kinsman. The trespasser must, in any case, put himself right with God.

No one in the camp where God dwells is to remain under the cloud of unfaithfulness. God looks for fidelity to Him in our relations with one another, and if there has been any breach of this He makes provision for it to be adjusted. And, in result, we find that the priest is enriched. Even a trespass becomes the means of enriching the priest, as well as "every heave-offering" and "every man's hallowed things" (verses 9, 10). Every trespass rightly dealt with increases what is spiritual amongst the saints. This is clearly the divine intent, and if we take God's way we shall reach God's end.

The covenant relations between Jehovah and His people are often set forth in figure by the marriage bond, and the remainder of this chapter must be read, and its import discerned, in the light of this.

The people having been numbered for military service, the camp ordered, the levitical carrying service appointed, the camps freed from defilement, and provision made for the adjustment of trespass, a deeper and more inward exercise is now suggested. God is jealous with regard to the affections of His people; they are under obligation to be faithful to Him. The unfaithfulness of those who have been in known relationship with God is more serious than the evil course of men who have never had any link with Him.

The spirit of jealousy comes in when the rights of divine love have been owned, where a covenant has been entered into, but cause has been given to suspect that some corrupting influence is at work. How often is the conduct of God's people such as to provoke Him to jealousy! We see this both in the Old Testament and the New (see 1 Corinthians 10:22). And when this is the case a divine testing will search the inward parts and discover the true state of the affections. At the present time it is always possible that there may be unfaithfulness, and therefore both the faithful and the unfaithful are constantly being brought under a process of testing which is searching enough to penetrate to the most secret thoughts and intents of the heart. Such testing as this chapter sets before us in type is not required in the case of those who

have manifestly got away from the Lord and gone into the world. *They* are exposed by their public course. But the woman who is subjected to the trial of jealousy is one who, if unfaithful, is so "in secret". There is "no witness against her"; she has "not been caught" in any delinquency (verse 13). Publicly all seems right. She is near to spiritual influences; she can be brought to the priest, and set by him before Jehovah; she can come near the altar. It is thus the testing of one in outward nearness, and apparently faithful to the bond in which she stands, but who may "be defiled in secret". It is the testing of those who are professedly faithful ones, and against whom there is no evidence that they are otherwise. But if we really call on the Lord out of a pure heart we need not shrink from the test; we shall gain immensely by allowing it to search us.

The first action is that the man upon whom the spirit of jealousy comes is to bring his wife to the priest, and also "her offering for her, a tenth part of an ephah of barley-meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is an oblation of jealousy, a memorial oblation, bringing iniquity to remembrance" (verse 15). No unfaithful woman in Israel could be taken by her husband to the priest without "her offering for her" being also taken, Nothing could be more wonderful than this. Christ is introduced at once, typified by "barley-meal". It is a gracious and yet a holy thought.

This is the only one of the offerings in which "barley-meal" appears, so that it typifies Christ in a special way. It is not His relation to sin or sins in a general way, but the fact that He has become an offering for those who have stood in covenant relations with God, but have been unfaithful to those relations. He is seen in this type as an offering for those who have professedly been lovers of God, but have been unfaithful. This has application, in principle, to Israel, or to those who profess to know God in the present period, or to any individual who may take the place of standing in relation to God. How affecting to any upright heart to consider that Christ has become an offering for persons who have been untrue to the relation in which they stood to God! I apprehend that, sooner or later, we all have to learn to value Him as having taken this place. Christ, in becoming an offering for unfaithful persons, has brought the memorial of unfaithfulness before God so that it might be judged according to the divine estimate of it. So that neither oil nor frankincense are put on the barley-meal. Christ was the Anointed One, His every desire was most fragrant to God, and He is seen in other offerings as "fine flour" which typifies His sinless and personal perfection in the minutest detail. But these precious thoughts are not brought before us in "the oblation of jealousy". He is seen here as "a memorial oblation, bringing iniquity to remembrance". God's object is to make unfaithfulness abhorrent to us, but He does so by directing our

thoughts to Christ who has brought the iniquity of an unfaithful people before God that it might be judged in His holy Person. Every secret has been searched out and exposed before God, but it has been exposed as taken up by Christ. He was aware of Israel's unfaithfulness when He came to her, but the injured One took its judgment upon Himself, so that, when her heart turns to Him she will learn to judge and abhor it as He does. In principle it is so with all unfaithfulness.

The Lord is ever jealous in regard of those He loves, and this jealousy is shared by all His true servants (2 Corinthians 11:2). Both He and they would ever be bringing us to "the priest" that the true state of our hearts may be made manifest. But we are not brought there without an offering, showing that what is really in God's mind is that we should learn to value Christ more through the experience. "And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before Jehovah". The thought of being brought to the priest is that we are taken apart from all carnal influences, and come under spiritual handling which sets us before God. If we are conscious of being before God it is the result of some priestly movement; it is indeed where spiritual influence would keep us. "The priest" is mentioned thirteen times in this section of the chapter, indicating what is holy and spiritual and what considers for God. Normally a spiritual person habitually lives as before God. Paul was, in all his responsible service, conscious of being "before God" (see 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 7:12; Galatians 1:20; 1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 4:1). Sooner or later the presence of God will test Us all; it is wise to let spiritual influences operate freely with us so as to bring us consciously before God now. The result will be that we shall be freed from self-deception, every corrupting influence will be exposed, and we shall learn how unfaithful we have been, perhaps in unsuspected ways, but we shall learn Christ, and shall value Him more. True fidelity of heart to Him will be promoted.

"And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and the priest shall take of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle, and put it into the water" (verse 17). The frailty of the human vessel is recognised (see 2 Corinthians 4:7); but the holy water in the vessel shows that divine power for purification is in every vessel wherein the Spirit dwells. God does not look for fidelity in frail humanity save as the fruit of His Spirit (see Galatians 5:2). The true character of the saint as being a vessel for the Spirit thus becomes a test. Paul so applies it in writing to the Corinthians and the Galatians, both which epistles may be regarded as the trial of divine jealousy. "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God; and ye are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Have we been

consistent individually or collectively with the fact that the Spirit is in us as "holy water"? How searching is this test!

There is a further thought in "the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle" being put into the water. This is clearly typical of death (see Genesis 3:19; Psalm 22:15), but it is not death as it may be known in the world, or in human experience. It is death as it is known in the holy place; that is, it typifies Christ as having been laid in the dust of death. Why was He there, if not to show in an unmistakable way that the end of all flesh has come before God? Every movement of fleshly character, everything that pertains to the life of the world, will surely come into the nothingness of death. It has already done so, for the people of God, in the death of Christ. The Spirit who indwells us ever witnesses to us the love of God expressed in the death of Christ, but He also witnesses that everything connected with us as in the flesh has been brought into the dust of death. Unfaithfulness consists in going astray from this, in loving what is of the world and living according to flesh. Every rival to God or to Christ calls into activity what is according to flesh, but the dust in the holy water, if its true import enters into us, exposes this as morally death and corruption. In thinking of the types of the tabernacle let us not forget "the dust that is on the floor". And may we understand how the Spirit would apply the death of Christ, as set forth in this type, as a test of our fidelity of heart to Him who loves us supremely!

"And the priest shall set the woman before Jehovah, and uncover the woman's head, and put the memorial oblation in her hands, which is the jealousy offering; and in the hand of the priest shall be the bitter water that bringeth the curse" (verse 18). Mark these movements carefully, for we are all called upon to submit ourselves to them. Priestly movements, whether brought about through our own exercises, or operating towards us through spiritual persons, will ever bring us to the presence of God. Faithfulness or unfaithfulness can only be rightly estimated there. As we have already said, sooner or later the presence of God will test us; we shall be uncovered, and the oblation will be put in our hands. We shall be caused to apprehend that God cannot tolerate in us what He has judged in the death of Christ. It is well for us to be brought to this in a priestly way in the holy exercises of our souls. I have no doubt that the intent of this chapter is that we should take up the exercises which it suggests. We should remember the "jealousy offering" aspect of the death of Christ, and accept the testing of it now in all sincerity and humility. This may lead us to realise, as never before, how unfaithful we have been but when this is felt and confessed in uprightness of soul, and there is the sense of how it has been judged in the death of Christ, we are morally cleansed from our unfaithfulness, and the confidence of our Husband is fully restored.

If there is no integrity of heart the bitter water brings only a curse. It enters into the bowels, "to make the belly to swell, and the thigh to shrink" (verse 22). When God is minded to test a heart that is not really true to Him it will be found that the belly will swell. It will be found that something is being pursued that is for self and not for God. It was so, in an awful way, in the case of Judas. And we have been told, in a very solemn passage, to turn away from "those who create divisions and occasions of falling, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learnt For such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly" (Romans 16:17,18). With all their "good words and fair speeches" they are really serving their own ends. Paul warns us of some "whose god is the belly" (Philippians 3:19); such are governed by self-interest, and while professing to be Christians their mind is on earthly things. Their "walk" had fully exposed them to Paul; his priestly eye could discern that their belly had swollen; they had become a curse among the people of God. The swollen belly and the shrunken thigh go together; they expose publicly the absence of spiritual motive, and that there is no power for a spiritual walk. When this appears the trial of jealousy has taken place, and has brought to light utter unfaithfulness. It will not be so absolutely in any true saint, but let us beware of every tendency in that direction.

We do not know when the Lord may test our faithfulness; no doubt He often does so in unexpected ways. But it is open to us to take up at any time the exercise which this chapter suggests, and to apply the divine test in all good conscience to ourselves. Indeed I think the woman being required to say, Amen, amen (verse 22) implies that she is supposed to be faithful in heart, and not unwilling to be divinely tested. If we call on the Lord out of a pure heart we know that, however much we have to judge in ourselves, we do desire to be true to Him. The testing in such cases may be humbling, as it was in regard of Simon, but it leads to increased dependence, and to our love for the Lord becoming apparent.

The curses being written in a book and blotted out with the bitter water, by the priest, would show that they are to stand unless they act morally in the soul by the Spirit so that the unfaithfulness which calls for them is inwardly judged. If they enter into us, as the bitter water did into the woman when she drank it, they are applied by a pure conscience in the bitterness of self-judgment, and this leads to purification so that the curse does not come upon us in a governmental way. It is, we might say, anticipated by the moral exercises of a faithful soul; the elements of unfaithfulness are judged within, and when this is the case there is a blotting out of the curses in the sense that they do not come upon us governmentally.

It is very striking that the priest does not make the woman drink the water until after he has taken out of her hand the oblation of jealousy and waved it before Jehovah and presented it at the altar. He had put the oblation in her hands before he pronounced the curses. God would not have His people to enter into any solemn exercise in relation to their own unfaithfulness without first filling their hands with Christ. Before we have to face the question of personal or collective unfaithfulness, or the testing which brings it to light, God would remind us that on that account Christ was brought into death for us. It has all come before God, and what is due to it, in the place which He took for us. Iniquity has been brought to remembrance by Christ taking it upon Himself, so that all that is due to it came upon Him. Apart from this there would be no hope of restoration or blessing for an unfaithful one. It is the sense of this that will break Israel's heart in a coming day. They will never rightly judge their long history of unfaithfulness until they see it as taken up in wondrous grace by their Messiah. They have looked in self-righteousness for a glorious and reigning Messiah to deliver them in an outward way, but they will learn how unfaithful they have been when they see that their Messiah has had to take it up, and suffer for it even unto death.

While this type has special reference to Israel its principles apply equally to ourselves. The Christian profession as a whole has been unfaithful, and none of us can say that there has been no unfaithfulness with us individually. But God would put the memorial oblation in our hands; He would cause us to know that Christ has stood in relation even to our unfaithfulness. The thought of it makes Him very precious, but how it leads us to abhor the unfaithfulness of which He bore the judgment! When Paul writes with his own hand, "If any one love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Corinthians 16:22), he is pronouncing the divine curse on unfaithfulness. But there is no one who has come under that curse for whom Christ is not, as yet, available. God would, in wondrous grace, put Christ into the hands even of the most unfaithful of His people. Bitter exercises may be needed for spiritual restoration, but God would cause them all to operate in the soul by His Spirit in relation to Christ who has suffered and died.

So before the woman drinks the bitter water her oblation is waved and presented at the altar; its memorial is burned upon the altar. It is "her offering for her", brought for her by her husband, however unfaithful she may have been. And the priest takes it out of her hand, and waves and presents it. No type is more touching, if we remember that Jehovah Himself is really the Husband against whom the unfaithfulness has been committed. And the priest represents what is spiritual amongst His people. But Christ is provided, and put into the very hands of the woman, so that she may realise that He is

indeed “her offering”, and it is out of her hands that He is taken and presented at the altar.

God would thus plainly say, My thought is that you should understand that Christ is your offering. Your conduct has been such as to provoke me to jealousy, but I want you to understand that Christ is for you. I would have you to judge all your own unfaithfulness through My Spirit bringing into your soul the exercise of how it has been judged in Christ upon the cross. Christ has been waved before Me; His sweet odour has ascended from the altar. If you have heart appreciation of Christ, and inwardly judge your own unfaithfulness in the light of Christ, you will be morally clean and undefiled, and you will become fruitful to Me. But if there is no appreciation of Christ I count everything else as unfaithfulness. If you do not judge the flesh it is the proof that you do not appreciate Christ, and you must bear your iniquity.

The woman is made to drink the water (verse 26); it enters into her inward parts so as to test all that is there. The divine thought, as it seems to me, being that unfaithfulness shall be searched out by inward exercises, the result of the import of the death of Christ being brought into the soul by the Spirit. God would have the unfaithful state, represented here by the defiled woman, to become detestable among His people. If a person is wholly unfaithful — that is, if there is nothing in the soul that has been wrought by God — the only issue of divine testing is that the true state becomes manifest. But the unfaithful woman is in every one of us; our flesh is not to be trusted for a moment; but if it is inwardly judged, in the light of true appreciation of Christ, the swollen belly and the shrunken thigh will not mark us publicly. We shall be clean, and shall become fruitful for God; the positive features of devotedness, as seen in the Nazarite in the next chapter, will come out in us.

The testing typified in this chapter is not merely a dealing with natural conscience, but a process which brings to light whether there are spiritual sensibilities, and true appreciations of Christ, in the very depths of the soul. If there are such appreciations the test finds something that corresponds with itself. If there are no such appreciations there is really nothing there for God, and the testing results in it becoming manifest that self-interest governs the heart, and there is no power for a spiritual walk.

NUMBERS 6

Numbers 6

Chapters 1 - 4 are divine orderings; they give us the mind of God as to the camps and as to levitical service. But chapter 5 shows that God had before Him that there would be unfaithfulness on the part of His people, and that it would necessitate their being passed through deep exercises that would secure truth in their inward parts, bringing to light what was clean as well as exposing what was defiled. Under such exercises what has been truly wrought by God becomes manifest in self-judgment, and in the Person and death of Christ becoming known and valued in the depths of the soul. This is the "clean" woman of chapter 5:28; faithfulness in the affections leads to fruitfulness, and the Nazarite is morally the "seed" conceived thereby. The Nazarite is the product of fidelity in the affections, so that there is consecration to God, not in an official or formal way, or even as in obedience to a command, but as the result of an inward movement in the heart of "a man or a woman".

"The special vow of a Nazarite" narrows the view considerably from what we have seen in chapters 1 - 4. It introduces the thought of individuals-or, we might say, a remnant-being separated to God in a special way, and this following upon the unfaithfulness of the people generally being indicated, in a figurative way, in the previous chapter. "The special vow of a Nazarite" is thus of deepest interest, for it makes known that, whatever the general state of the people of God may be, there is an opportunity for any who desire to "consecrate (or separate) themselves to Jehovah" to do so. The saints in Macedonia "gave themselves first to the Lord, and to us by God's will"

(2 Corinthians 8:5); they went even beyond what the Apostle hoped; a beautiful example for us all!

God loves to take notice of what is spontaneous on the part of His saints, and in His economy provision is made for the special as well as the ordinary. "The special vow of a Nazarite" has in view a distinctive separation to God, the outcome of a definite movement of heart towards Him. Indeed a "vow" of any kind is the product of a special exercise, as we may see in 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 66:13,14. Have we known anything of such a "special" movement of heart? Or are we content to conform to the standards of Christian living which seem to be adopted by the many? Perhaps there are few believers who have not when under discipline, or at times of special spiritual movement in their souls, made vows. We know that Paul had a vow when he was in Corinth; probably the conditions amidst which he had to labour in that city led him to

feel the necessity for special dedication to God. A true vow is the expression of spiritual purpose to be definitely for the Lord, and God takes notice of it, and holds one to it. His discipline will, if necessary, come in to help us in relation to our vow.

"The special vow of a Nazarite" requires a peculiar degree of separation; it supposes a "special" measure of devotedness, and there is an opportunity for each one of us to excel in this way if our hearts prompt us to do so. Who can doubt that Timothy was peculiarly near to Paul in his devotedness? "He works the work of the Lord, even as I" (1 Corinthians 16:10). "For I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 2:20,21). The Spirit of God has called our attention to some who were evidently "special" in devotion to the Lord's interests. Such saints as Priscilla, Aquila, Phoebe, Gaius,

Epaphroditus, Epaphras, the house of Stephanas, come at once to our minds. That such were not very numerous even in Paul's day becomes manifest as we read his epistles. It is touching to read, after the mention of several names, "These are the only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me" (Colossians 4:11). The number of true Nazarites in the Israel of God has never been large, but there have been such, and I believe the Lord would move our hearts to desire that there should be something "special" in our devotedness and separation to Him. The chapter before us furnishes, in a typical way, very definite instruction as to how "the special vow of a Nazarite" is to be carried out.

The Nazarite in Israel was a remarkable witness that in the divine mind the time for joy of an earthly character had not yet come. So that one who devoted himself in a special way to God must needs separate himself from that which represented it. "He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink: he shall drink no vinegar of wine, nor vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat grapes fresh or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine, from the seed-stones to the skin" (verses 3,4). The Israelite in Canaan had his vineyards, and there was naturally gladness when wine increased, for it is said to gladden the heart of man (Psalm 104:15). But the Nazarite separated himself from it because of his consecration to God! It said plainly to every exercised heart and mind that the kingdom of God had not yet come. Nazariteship would certainly have no meaning in heaven; there is nothing there for a devoted heart to separate from, for God's will is done absolutely. And when the kingdom of God is set up on earth Nazarite-ship will not be called for, when His will is done on earth as in heaven. That is why we have in this chapter the thought of the

days of consecration being fulfilled, and of the Nazarite afterwards drinking wine. The "special vow" is for a prescribed period, and it contemplates a time when that period would end.

Even in Israel, where promises referred to earthly blessing (but all connected with the coming in of Christ, and therefore not to be enjoyed in any true sense without Him), special consecration to God required separation from the vine and its products. Then how much more does the principle of this apply now since God's King has come and been rejected? Natural enjoyments, social pleasures, a thousand and one things which stimulate and excite human feelings by what is agreeable to men — as distinct from natural relationships on the one hand, and what is positively sinful and wicked on the other — are now found in a world which has rejected Christ, and they are unclean by reason of the fact that what is due to Him does not enter into them at all. God has no part in them, nor has His blessed Son. Christ is now the heavenly Nazarite, not drinking of the fruit of the vine until He will do so in a new way in the kingdom of God (see Mark 14:25).

Any special consecration to God now requires the recognition of this. Innumerable things of an earthly character, which are agreeable to men as men, furnish to God's Nazarites an opportunity for separation. Such are under obligation to exercise self-restraint in regard of much that would naturally appeal to them. They are concerned to be true to their "special vow", and to maintain a personal holiness and separation that are in keeping with it. The Nazarite had no official dignity like the priest or the king; his holy purity was of a personal nature; and yet it excelled even that of the sons of Aaron, and corresponded with that of the high priest himself (compare Numbers 6:7 with Leviticus 21:2,11).

There was, perhaps, no more striking witness in Israel than the presence amongst them of Nazarites — men and women consecrated to God, and evidencing in their persons the distinctive beauty of separation to God. "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their figure was as sapphire" (Lamentations 4:7). And no man or woman in Israel was excluded from being a Nazarite; the privilege awaited the promptings of any heart that had learned God according to Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus. For Numbers follows these books morally. It supposes God known in grace and faithfulness, His covenant entered into, His testimony appreciated, the preciousness of Christ known. It was all this that moved one to personal dedication according to Numbers 6. Nor is it otherwise today. What pains God has taken to pass us through our Exodus and Leviticus to make Himself known to us, and to make Christ precious to us, so that we

may be liberated in spirit and enlarged in heart towards Him, so that we may cherish the thought of being separated to Him! We cannot all be prominent in the assembly as having great gifts, but we may all carry the moral beauty and dignity of separation to God. And it would not be too much to say that the testimony of God today largely depends on the spirit of Nazariteship being found amongst His people. May we all covet to be characterised by it!

The Lord generally awakens in young believers a desire to be specially for Him, but sometimes the desire fails to take definite form. A "special vow" would indicate that the desire takes such form by the Spirit that it leads to a distinct degree of separation. True devotion matures in this way as the outcome of prayer. Satan may get an advantage, and the head of consecration be defiled, as we see in verse 9, but a true Nazarite does not give up his vow. "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for Jehovah sustaineth him with his hand" (Psalm 37:24). He learns humbling, but needed, lessons, and eventually he fulfils "the days of his separation".

"All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head; until the days be fulfilled, that he hath consecrated himself to Jehovah, he shall be holy; he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow" (verse 5). The words of the apostle Paul come to our minds in this connection: "Does not even nature itself teach you, that man, if he have long hair, it is a dishonour to him?" (1 Corinthians 11:14). So long as there is any excellency about separation to God there must necessarily be something peculiar about it. The very idea involves something distinctive which is an honour before God, and a deep inward satisfaction to the one who takes it up in love to Him, but which is different from the ordinary life of men. Nazariteship in Israel was even something different from the ordinary life of the people of God, suggesting that there may be a "special" separation to God which has distinctive features even amongst His people. And the unshorn locks intimate plainly that such a separation will involve personal surrender in some way; it will not lead to increased honour in a public way, but rather the reverse. The Nazarite would make up his mind that the longer his "special vow" lasted the more marked would be the distinctiveness of it, and this in regard of any attempt to maintain personal dignity or honour in a natural way. If we conform to the world we shall have its approval: if we fall in with the ordinary ways of the Christian profession we shall escape reproach. But if we purpose to be in special separation to God we must be prepared to accept its consequences in some kind of reproach or dishonour. The world is away from God, therefore one consecrated to God must be separate from it. The professed people of God are not walking in His ways in the beauty of holiness, therefore if one is separated to God there is a marked difference between him and them.

The second chapter of 2 Timothy is largely a call to Nazariteship in the midst of a corrupt profession; and the overcomer in the assemblies (Revelation 2, Revelation 3) would of necessity be in separation to God from all the features which were under divine disapproval. The thought of Nazariteship would have no place if things in general came up to what was in God's mind. It is because they do not that the "special vow" of consecration has peculiar value. I think it has its place in Numbers as suggesting that what was in God's mind would only be answered to in reality by a remnant who would, as consecrated to Him, be witnesses that the time for earthly blessing or honour had not yet come. It introduces the thought of a remnant characterised by special devotedness, which is carried through to completion in spite of any breakdown that comes in by the way. A special witness is thus preserved until the days of Nazariteship are over, when the Nazarite will drink wine in the kingdom of God, and enjoy it more deeply on account of his faithfulness in separation during the time that separation was called for. Then, when the Nazarite drinks wine in the kingdom of God, there will be a wide extension of blessing. The whole of God's earthly people will come, under the priestly blessing of Aaron and His sons, into His blessing and keeping, and into the peace of the world to come (see verses 22 - 27). It is a beautiful picture of what marks the present time — holy separation on the part of those consecrated to God — and also of the coming day when Nazariteship will have its answer and recompense in the joy of the kingdom.

"All the days that he hath consecrated himself to Jehovah, he shall come near no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister when they die; for the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy to Jehovah" (verses 6 - 8). We see repeatedly in this book that contact with a dead body renders unclean; and here the Nazarite "sinned by the dead person" if he touched him. We may also note that the possibility of his defiling the head of his consecration in this way is contemplated, while it is not referred to in relation to his separation from the vine, or his locks being unshorn. So that this last feature is evidently the point of greatest danger, where there is the greatest possibility of being defiled. It was also a point where something might happen "unexpectedly" by him suddenly, calling for particular watchfulness.

It is important that we should understand what is typified by a "dead body", and we may learn this by observing how death is spoken of in a moral sense in Scripture. The Lord said to one whom He had called to follow Him, "Suffer the dead to bury their own dead, but do thou go and announce the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). In so saying the Lord made it clear that, as regards the mass of those who were in the place of being the people of God, they were

"the dead". Israel is at present in that condition, so that their future reception by God will indeed be "life from among the dead" (Romans 11:15). It is to this that Isaiah refers when he says, "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise" (Isaiah 26:19). But in "the dead", as such, there is nothing for God; they do not praise Him (Psalm 115:17,18); it is "the living, the living" — twice repeated to make it very emphatic — who do that (Isaiah 38:19). The man who wanders out of the way of wisdom "shall abide in the congregation of the dead" (Proverbs 21:16).

The Nazarite was to "come near no dead body". It intimates that conditions would be present amongst God's people in which there would be nothing for Him. When the voice of the Son of God has not been heard in life-giving power persons are dead (John 5:25); though they may have "a name" that they live, they are really dead (Revelation 3:1). Such a condition as that in man is defiling. There may be no gross evil; there may even be a great show of good works and religious activity; beautiful words may be uttered, the very words of Scripture, but there is *nothing for God*. Now it is a solemn reality that one who is himself amongst the living — who is even separated to God by a special vow — may be defiled by contact with a condition in which there is nothing for God. Viewed spiritually, that is not only unclean in itself but it is contaminating to the living. So that if any are separated to God they must beware of touching-of course in a moral sense-what is really dead.

The second epistle of Timothy is written by Paul as an "apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, according to promise of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus", and he speaks of "our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings" (2 Timothy 1:1,10). But if life thus comes in, according to God's own purpose and grace, it is maintained in practical purity by Nazariteship — by withdrawing from iniquity, and separating from those who do not truly honour God, To "touch" an unclean thing, according to Scripture,

is simply the opposite to separating from it (see 2 Corinthians 6:17). And if we "touch" what has no vitality Godward — that is, if we do not maintain separation from it — the head of our consecration will be defiled.

In relation to this, the possibility is suggested of one dying "unexpectedly by him suddenly". It is not, sup-posed that he would touch a dead person voluntarily, but he might "unexpectedly" do so. In such a case it might be said that he could not help himself, and therefore could not be held responsible for what had happened! But such reasoning is human, and, as we shall see, not in accord with the mind of God. For the priest has to "make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead person" (verse 11). True Nazariteship calls

for great watchfulness and circumspection; defilements would not occur "unexpectedly" to a man or woman who had pondered "the law of the Nazarite". Such would be aware of the danger; they would be ever vigilant lest the thing they had been warned against should happen. There is a scripture which says, "had he taken warning he would have delivered his soul". Defilements are almost invariably contracted through unwatchfulness, and we are fully responsible for this. I may say that I was taken unawares, but this is no excuse; it is a humbling confession that I have not heeded the Lord's words, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation".

The unwatchfulness which would lead to the Nazarite being defiled "unexpectedly", notwithstanding the warning which the law gives him, would indicate some degree of self-confidence. A vow may be taken up in all sincerity but without sufficient self-distrust. Indeed, in the type the man or woman are presented as having entered upon the "first days" of their separation without bringing any offering. They have not begun at the altar with the recognition that nothing of flesh will avail, that the death of Christ is needed to meet all the conditions on their side. The thought of consecration is often taken up without much depth of self-knowledge. In such cases dependence is not complete; there is not the looking entirely outside self for all sources of strength; nor is there the needed watchfulness in regard of realised weakness and the dangers that beset the Nazarite. When this is so, there is an element even about consecration which exposes it to defilement.

A failure in regard of Nazariteship carries with it very peculiar exercise, for it is a failure to maintain a separation which one's own heart has suggested and desired. It is very humbling to be made conscious that even in regard of this one has been on a line which could not be carried through, and which we have to learn to judge as of no spiritual value. This is set forth by the defiled Nazarite shaving his head on the day of his cleansing (verse 9). The exercises set forth in type in chapter 19:11 - 22 come in at this point, and have to be taken account of. The result of going through them is that the past days of Nazariteship are completely set aside, and he begins entirely anew on a different footing. "The first days are forfeited (or, fall), for his consecration hath been defiled" (verse 12). How often do we get in Scripture the thought of a "first" which ends in failure, and then a second which answers to the mind of God! And this divine lesson enters in a weighty manner into "the law of the Nazarite".

The days during which the water of purification is sprinkled on the defiled Nazarite on the third and the seventh, according to chapter 19, have to be gone through. This is a deep and searching exercise, for it brings home to him

that there has been a fleshly element even in his consecration, which he now judges as having come under the divine purifying of the death of Christ, and he discards his "first days" as of no spiritual value. Then he comes to an "eighth day", which has no place in chapter 19, "and he shall hallow his head that same day" (verse 11). The "eighth day" is the first day of a new week, but looked at as standing in some relation to the previous seven days. So the "two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons" are brought for a sin-offering and a burnt-offering, to "make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead person". He has now learned that "the first days" were of such a character that they did not count at all, save as requiring a sin-offering. And the burnt-offering being also brought typifies the apprehension of an entirely new ground of acceptance in Christ, and through the "sweet-odour" of His offering of Himself. The Nazarite does not give up his vow, but he learns to take it up in a new way. The break-down of the "first days" teaches him to distrust himself, and to see that nothing but the death of Christ could meet his failure on the line of the flesh, or furnish a ground on which he could really "hallow his head". It is to be observed that there was no *hallowing* when he first began, but there is on the eighth day when all that went before is given up as worthless. There is going to be something new, taken up in the light of Christ and of His death, that will be really for God. There is no suggestion in the type that the second consecration will break down. The death of Christ has now been learned as purifying from what is of the flesh, and consecration is renewed on the ground that what is fleshly has been judged in that death, and that there is a wholly new ground of acceptance through the burnt-offering.

The Nazarite, in beginning again, also brings "a yearling lamb for a trespass offering". He sees that his break-down has been so serious that nothing but the death of Christ could make amends for it. He has a mature apprehension of this, as the larger offering suggests. He consecrates to Jehovah the days of his separation in a sense of this; he is now, in type, a self-judged and self-humbled man. He thinks much of Christ, and lets go as worthless all the "first days", which, as being defiled and forfeited, are now seen to have been lacking in the true spiritual features of separation to God. There are great lessons in all this. How many have started out with true desire to be wholly for the Lord, but not having learned to distrust themselves, there is self-confidence leading to unwatchfulness, and then humbling failure to maintain what was desired! God uses this to teach us that the death of Christ is needed to bring to an end everything on our side according to flesh. We learn to value that death much more than we did before, and to count that even the consecration of the "first days" — that is, when flesh was not truly judged in the light of Christ's death — is all worthless, and has to be forfeited. We have

to come to an end of all confidence in our own devotedness and purpose of heart; so that we may start afresh with God in the apprehension of Christ. The sin-offering is the death of Christ as meeting all our failure, but the burnt-offering is the death of Christ as the great expression of His perfect devotedness, and that is now prominently before us rather than our own consecration. The vow is now pursued in the light of our appreciation of Christ, and as counting on His support. It may be noted that the Nazarite begins again with two turtle-doves or two young pigeons, but when his days of consecration are fulfilled he brings a yearling he-lamb for a burnt-offering and a yearling ewe-lamb for a sin-offering. He begins small in his apprehension of Christ, but he ends with a relatively large apprehension. This is how it should ever be.

We have now to consider "the law of the Nazarite on the day when the days of his consecration are fulfilled" (verse 13). We have already referred to the dispensational bearing of this, and the change which will be brought about by the coming publicly of the kingdom of God. But, while this is clearly in view, the typical teaching of this chapter seems to include the thought that a certain result of fulfilled Nazarite-ship may be reached morally in the assembly. I think this is suggested in the Nazarite being "brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting" (verse 13) to present a very comprehensive series of offerings. Separation to God leads to great wealth in the knowledge of Christ, and this being brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting — the common point of approach to God for all Israel — would teach us that what is acquired by a consecrated individual is intended to enrich the whole assembly, and to enhance the spiritual character of its communion. The Nazarite has this end before him all the time; he holds himself under special restraint in relation to things which do not at present minister to the pleasure of God, having in view enlargement in that which does directly serve His pleasure, and the gain of which will widen out to all the brethren. It is a very stimulating thought that true separation to God will work out in this way.

It is as we maintain separation to God that we acquire in our souls rich apprehensions of Christ as the burnt-offering, the sin-offering, the peace-offering, the oblation of fine flour mingled with oil and anointed with oil, and the drink-offering. We may be sure that there will be peculiar sweetness and wealth in these precious and varied apprehensions of Christ when they have been developed in the soul of a man or a woman who has been separated to God. And that is how they are viewed in this chapter: they are such apprehensions as only a Nazarite would acquire. But they are brought to the door of the tent of meeting, so that all who come there may rejoice in what is offered to God, and may participate, if clean, in the communion of the peace-

offering, while the priest gets his particular portion in the wave breast and the heave-shoulder. For remarks on the typical significance of these offerings in detail, (see "An Outline of Leviticus", chapters 1 - 7).

"And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his consecration at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair of the head of his consecration, and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace-offering" (verse 18). We see here, in a remarkable type, how faithful Nazariteship contributes to the communion of saints. The ram is offered as a sacrifice of peace-offering to Jehovah, but while those parts representing the excellency of Christ were being burned as "an offering by fire to Jehovah of a sweet odour", the hair of the Nazarite's consecration-the witness of its faithful completion-was put by him on the altar fire. Such an offering was unique. It is the only instance in which anything which might be regarded as personal to a saint was put on that sacred fire. The separation of the Nazarite becomes in a peculiar way a sacrificial offering to God. But it is identified with the peace-offering, to teach us what an important bearing the separation of the saints has on their communion or fellowship. The excellencies of Christ are offered to God, but the one who has brought them has been himself so separate to God that he is personally in accord with his offering. How acceptable is this to God! Then all who partook of the ram would be in communion with the altar; they would regard this particular peace-offering in its own setting. It was a communion in which the preciousness of Christ was enjoyed together, but which was also directly the outcome of intense separation to God on the part of the offerer. His Nazariteship entered into it and gave it character. Such a fellowship as this depends on faithful Nazariteship. The saints have the privilege of walking in holy separation to God, in view of taking up together in common joy before Him their portion in Christ. Nazariteship thus becomes contributory to the joy of the fellowship, and, from the point of view of this chapter, is essential to it.

"When the days of his consecration are fulfilled" the thought of separation drops, and the thought of *offering* takes its place; the priest becomes the prominent actor. Indeed, the Nazarite putting his hair on the altar fire may be said to be a priestly act; and then the priest puts on his hands what speaks only of Christ, and it is waved before Jehovah for His delight. The Nazarite becomes identified with the priest, and is before God in conditions which are complacent to God. It is obvious that the thought of separation has no place there; in that holy sphere the exercises of Nazariteship are at an end.

"And afterwards the Nazarite may drink wine" (verse 20). I think we should misunderstand the teaching of the type if we did not recognise that the wine which he drinks "afterwards" is a different kind of wine from that which he

was separated from before. Our Lord's words, with reference to His own Nazariteship, would confirm this. "But I say to you, that I will not at all drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new (of another kind) with you in the kingdom of my Father" (Matthew 26:29; see also Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).

It is obvious to the spiritual mind that the wine which He will drink in *His* "afterwards" will be very different from that which has now to be refused by His Nazarites. The kingdom of His Father — the kingdom of God — will bring in a gladness the like of which has never been known before. It was, indeed, brought near to men by the Son of God, for He was the Bridegroom with ability to furnish "the good wine" abundantly. But men refused Him, and He is now the Nazarite, as separated from earthly joy until that joy takes an entirely new character in the kingdom of God. Men on earth will then be glad to enjoy their portion in relation to God, His love and favour will be their delight — the new wine of His kingdom.

But for us the "new wine" of that kingdom has already come in; it stands connected not with earthly things, but with the shining upon us of God's love and favour in Christ. Two verses in Psalm 4 state the position exactly: "Many say, Who shall cause us to see good?" Faith's answer to this question is, "Lift up upon us the light of thy countenance, O Jehovah". This results in the experience of verse 7, "Thou hast put joy in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their new wine was in abundance". Note the expressions, "*their* corn ... *their* new wine"! The man set apart for Jehovah (see verse 3) — the Nazarite — can speak of what is *theirs*. The "many" lay themselves out to enjoy the good which the earth affords without any sense that the kingdom of God is not here, or any desire for it to come. They have "*their* new wine", and sometimes they have it in abundance. But the Nazarite looks to another Source for *his* wine, and he gets it of an entirely different kind from theirs, and infinitely more excellent. If we enjoy "*their* new wine" we cannot enjoy the new wine that belongs to the Father's kingdom. Nazariteship in regard of the one is essential to the enjoyment of the other.

This may serve to bring out the connection between fulfilled Nazariteship and the priestly blessing at the end of Numbers 6. We have seen the result of separation to God in the comprehensive offerings which the Nazarite brings to the door of the tent of meeting. We have also seen that the priest — representing what is spiritual — gains in a marked way. Then, following upon this, there is a priestly blessing which brings out what is in the heart of God towards His people in a beautiful way. The blessing is for "the children of Israel"; it extends to all His people; but it is seen here as immediately

following "the law of the Nazarite". It thus indicates the line on which blessing comes in the government of God. If a small remnant are marked by separation to God, it gives occasion to Him to bring out His thoughts as to the whole assembly. We see this in Philadelphia. The whole assembly may be blessed through a few faithful individuals. Indeed we cannot tell what may result from the true Nazariteship of even one devoted heart.

Separation ministers to what is priestly, and what is priestly ministers to the blessing of the whole assembly. The moral sequence of this chapter must be ever borne in mind. "Jehovah bless thee and keep thee". All that makes men truly happy flows out from the heart of God, and it is according to His great thoughts. And He is the Keeper as well as the Blessor; He would ever maintain in our souls a profound sense that we need His keeping. When the Son spoke to the Father about His own He used the words "keep" or "kept" three times, and He also spoke of their being "guarded" (John 17). As in a scene of evil, and having weakness in ourselves, how great is the need of being "kept"! Divine faithfulness is alone our stay and strength.

"Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee". In the unveiled face of the Mediator God is effulgent in the glory of His grace, and His unchanging thoughts and disposition toward us are radiant. He is ever toward us according to His own blessed nature. Then, finally, "Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace". That conveys the thought of His approval and complacency, so that the deep peace is "set" in the heart (see margin) of being approved of God. Now the true Aaron blesses according to these wondrous thoughts; nothing less is ever in His heart toward us. And "His sons" also bless on this wise; the priestly and the spiritual among the people of God are in the light and grace of this marvellous blessing, and would ever be seeking to bring it in power and enjoyment into the hearts of the Israel of God. How happy are those who come consciously into the good of it! Blessed, kept, illuminated with divine love and favour, and now approved of God! All this is truly the "new wine" of the kingdom of God which becomes the portion and joy of the Nazarite.

"And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them". The climax of all is that what God is as revealed, and as He would be known by His people, is put upon them. They are invested with His Name so as to henceforth bear it in testimony here.

NUMBERS 7

Numbers 7

The circumstances recorded in this chapter have a peculiar interest, for they bring out! a remarkable appreciation, on the part of "the princes of the tribes", of the holy anointed system which had been set up in their midst. The offerings spoken of in this chapter were purely voluntary and spontaneous; without any commandment the "princes" gave a spiritual lead to the tribes which was appropriate and pleasing to God.

In regard to the construction of the tabernacle every detail was to be "as Jehovah commanded Moses". All was set up after a heavenly pattern, and anointed by Moses; it was all exactly as God intended it to be. But in the offering of the princes we see another side. The people, as represented by their tribal "heads", came forward to offer; they contributed what was suitable to further the service of the tabernacle, both in regard to its wilderness movements and its altar service Godward.

This chapter shows, as it seems to me, what God would have to mark His saint in every locality. For the twelve princes represented all the tribes; they typify a spiritual lead given in every part of the Israel of God. Some of the tribes were much larger, numerically, than others; they varied from 74,000 in Judah down to 32,000 in Manasseh, but the same lead was given by every one of the princes. God has been pleased to set His testimony in different localities, but, while the assemblies may be small or relatively large, the same character of spiritual leading is to have place universally. We should be concerned that in every local assembly there shall be an element of spiritual leading which is in correspondence with the divine system.

The principle of leadership has a great place in divine order; God would always provide those who are able to give a spiritual lead to His people. But it is important for us all to see that we follow a spiritual lead, for Christendom is full of Korahs, Dathans, and Abirams — princes and men of renown — who would lead us in a wrong direction. But such leaders as we see in chapter 7 can be safely followed, and we can gladly and thankfully recognise that God has raised up and set amongst His people those who give a spiritual lead. It is our privilege and happiness to follow such a lead.

Two great features of spiritual leading are seen here. The first is a beautiful spirit of co-operation in the work of the Lord, and the second is that the altar is dedicated by receiving what it was intended to receive. These are two things

which God would have to be secured in every locality where His people are found, whether the "tribe" is small or large.

The tabernacle as a whole, and the altar in particular, are seen here as set up and anointed and hallowed by Moses. The true tabernacle, we are told, was pitched by the Lord, and not man (Hebrews 8:2); it is not of the world; it is entirely apart from human imperfection. In the system set up by the Lord, and anointed, every detail has divine character, and can only be maintained as under the anointing of the Spirit. It was never in the mind of God that the great realities which He has set up should be preserved in any other way than in the power of the anointing. They were so set up at Pentecost, and so they still remain where-ever they are truly known. There is a remarkable expression in Malachi 2:15, "the remnant of the Spirit was his", attaching a remnant thought even to the Spirit, and suggesting that the Spirit remains true to what He began with. We have often been reminded that a "remnant" in Scripture does not mean a fag-end, but something which retains its original character in the midst of departure. There is that which remains still as anointed, something which is not of flesh or of man, but which expresses divine thoughts. It is not merely a little better than what is found in the Christian profession generally, but, something which is of God, and carries the anointing of His Spirit, and thus has a hallowed character. Now that is to be our chief interest in every locality where the Lord has set us. The tabernacle having been set up it is of great importance that a spiritual lead shall be given to all the tribes which encamp round it, that is, to all the local assemblies. A tribe without a "prince" is not contemplated; a local assembly without the element of spiritual lead would not answer at all to the mind of God.

The "princes" who offered were men who realised the wonderful character of what had been set up in the tabernacle. As having an appreciation of it they could, without any specific instructions, act in relation to it; they could offer what was suitable. The spring of spontaneity in response to God lies in the fact that something is brought in which by its greatness and preciousness commands the heart. It was something having come in from God of surpassing excellence which called forth the choice offerings of the magi (Matthew 2:11), the ministry of the women (Luke 8:3), the anointings (Luke 7; John 12), the praises of the children in the temple (Matthew 21:15), the offerings laid at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:35,37). All were spontaneous, and all flowed from hearts which were commanded by something most precious.

The tabernacle having been set up, and anointed, and hallowed, immediately the "princes" came forward with an offering of "waggons". They desired to

have some part in furthering the service set forth in chapters 3,4. They seem to have taken to heart that it would be a privilege to facilitate the work as much as possible. I am sure that the Lord would encourage such an exercise in every local assembly of His saints. The testimony is exceedingly precious, and it is moving through a scene where difficulties abound. Its service is not irksome to those who render it, for it is a labour of love, but it is "toil" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Think of the labours of Paul! What could be more diligent and laborious than his continual care for the testimony of God? The work of the Lord is a serious matter; it calls for diligent zealousness and fervency of spirit. And the privilege is granted to all saints to do something to facilitate that holy work.

The "princes" had also caught the idea of *covering*, which is prominent in chapter 4, for they brought "*covered* waggons". The things carried were not to be exposed; they were to be protected from the surrounding influences of the wilderness. The things connected with the testimony of the Lord are not for public display. The word "mystery" is very characteristic of the present period; it means that divine things are only known to those who are initiated; they are never to be regarded as things which can be brought within the range of the natural man. They are *holy* things, and they are to be preserved inviolate while they are being carried through a scene which is everywhere marked by what is unholy, and defiling.

The whole design of the tabernacle showed that it was not intended to be a fixed structure; everything about it had movement in view. Men have done their best to give Christianity a fixed form; we see material buildings intended to stand for centuries, and creeds and formularies which can be accepted and adhered to without any living exercise, and in which no spiritual movement is possible. But God's intention was that His testimony should ever be accompanied by exercise and movement. It was to traverse the wilderness under divine direction, in constant dependence, and with the Levites ever ready to take up their carrying service. Such is the divine thought; we are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. The "princes" had movement in their minds. They had no idea of settling down in the wilderness, so they offered "waggons"; their thought was that the work should be facilitated, and in no wise hindered.

"Waggons" are accessory; they were not provided for in the original ordering, but were suggested by thoughtful love. There is room in the divine economy for every suggestion of love; whatever love prompts will fit into the divine plan. So Jehovah says, "Take it of them". It is encouraging to see this. If at personal cost we can further the work of the Lord without in any way

compromising divine order, we may be sure that it will be acceptable to God that we should do so. I take it that a "waggon" might represent something that we could not precisely give chapter and verse for, but love suggests it; it facilitates the work of the Lord, and God accepts it. In the service of the testimony there is room for the suggestiveness of love. Christianity is not a cut and dried system; it is a spiritual system, and leadership comes out in the ability to suggest in love what is suitable to be associated with it.

The "waggons" seem to represent what is not exactly spiritual in itself, but which furthers the work of the Lord. We have the privilege of seeing that the work does not bear heavily on those who are engaged in it; there are many ways in which we can give practical help. Mark was serviceable to Paul for ministry; Tertius wrote a long epistle to saints at Rome at his dictation; Phoebe helped him in some way not known to us; Gaius and Philemon entertained him; saints in Philippi sent him needful things; Onesiphorus often refreshed him; in all these services we may see what would answer to the "waggons" of Numbers 7. Such help as this, if administered under priestly direction—"under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest"—would be apportioned "to each according to his service" (verses 5,7,8). The *kind* of work in which each is engaged would be considered. Some services are more in need of accessory help than others. For example, some undertake long journeys, others make the distribution of books and tracts a great part of their service, while others again are in circumstances where temporal needs come much before them, and have to be met, if possible, that some practical expression of grace may go along with, and adorn, the ministry of grace. Help such as the "waggons" typify is not to be allotted indiscriminately, but with due regard to the service of each. No true Levite would desire to have more help of this kind than he actually needed, or could profitably use in the work of the Lord.

But "waggons" have no part in that spiritual ministry which is called "the service of the sanctuary", and which is allotted to the sons of Kohath (verse 9). This is a service in which nothing can have place but spiritual power. "Waggons" add nothing to the Kohathites; they bear "upon the shoulder"; no accessory help enters into this. The varied helps which Paul received from one and another in a material way added nothing to his Kohathite service. That was a matter for which he was a chosen vessel, and which was carried out in the grace and spiritual power for it which he had directly from the Lord. The saints might, indeed, help in this by prayer, but this is sanctuary support given to sanctuary service; it is in itself Kohathite service of a high and priestly order. It belongs to an altogether different range of things from the kind of help which is typified by "waggons". It is important that we should distinguish between what has "sanctuary" character, and which is sustained purely by

spiritual means and power, indicated by bearing "upon the shoulder", and those accessory helps to the work of the Lord which are in view in the "waggons". There are holy ministries which are borne only in personal spiritual power. For example, the writing of the Gospels, and the ministry of the apostles, was Kohathite service of a very high order; "waggons" could have no part there. But the copying and circulating by others of what the apostles ministered would greatly further the movements of the testimony, and such a service as this might correspond with the offering of "waggons".

"The service of the sanctuary" is not facilitated by "waggons"; it depends on the personal spiritual power of those who render it, and on the spiritual service of prayer by the saints as the holy priesthood. When Paul said to Timothy, "fill up the full measure of thy ministry", and would have Archippus to "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, to the end that thou fulfil it", I think he had before him a service which was to be carried on purely in spiritual power. But Paul said to the Corinthians, "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear; for he works the work of the Lord, even as I. Let not therefore any one despise him; but set him forward in peace, that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren" (1 Corinthians 16:10,11). In this he is giving the Corinthians the opportunity to provide "waggons"; that is, to do what they could to facilitate Timothy's service and movements. *All* can have part in this.

Such an offering as the princes brought has its fitting place and value, but it does not extend to Kohathite service, the holy things of the sanctuary had still to be borne on the shoulders of the Kohathites. To put the holy things in a waggon would have been a breach of divine order which would have incurred God's displeasure, as David found to his cost (1 Chronicles 13:7 - 10; 1 Chronicles 15:2,13). It is important to notice this; if any supposed offering of love set aside divine order, or practically became a substitute for spiritual power in ministry, we should know that it was altogether out of place. But "waggons" could, without any breach of divine order, be useful in relation to matters accessory to the service which are in themselves of a lower grade than the ministry of the sons of Kohath. The actual use of the waggons was according to the service required; it was allotted by Moses and was under the hand of Ithamar, all being assigned in wisdom.

While recognising the secondary place which "waggons" have in relation to the testimony we do well to note the beautiful evidence of co-operation which they afford. Two princes joined in the offering of each waggon, and each contributed an ox: Every part of the levitical service seems designed to emphasise the importance of practical co-operation in the work of the Lord,

and this principle is also illustrated in a marked way in the offering of the princes. Co-operation is not quite the same thing as fellowship, though, of course, it must be in the light and bond of the fellowship. Partners in a business are in a fellowship determined by the terms of their partnership, but if they do not co-operate their business will most likely come to grief. We might say that as Israelites we are in the fellowship, but as Levites we have to learn to co-operate. Paul refers to "every one joined in the work and labouring" (1 Corinthians 16:16). This is the thought of co-operation; it signifies practical agreement and working together with a common end in view. Paul said of Timothy, "he works the work of the Lord, even as I" (1 Corinthians 16:10); "as a child a father, he has served with me in the work of the glad tidings" (Philippians 2:22). He calls Epaphroditus his "fellow-work-man", and speaks of others as "fellow-labourers". This co-operation is what the Lord intends to mark every local assembly of His people. That we are not only walking together according to the truth of the fellowship, but we are actively co-operating to further in every possible way the work of the Lord. What we see in the "princes" is a perfect blending not only of interest but of action—a true and practical working together.

This is what is needed if the work of the Lord is to be furthered. It is indicated by the Lord sending out His disciples two and two. We see how Paul delighted to join Timothy and others with him in labour. An apprehension of the anointed system would bring about a holy blending of interest. The Lord had this in view when He said, "if two of you shall agree on the earth concerning any matter, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in the heavens" (Matthew 18:19). Each prince brings an ox — a full measure of spiritual energy and steady purposeful labour — but it is brought to pull in a yoke with another in a perfect uniting of labour. This is how "princes" offer. Many a one has energy, but is not sufficiently devoted to the anointed system to blend with others in furthering it. Paul was ready to blend with the twelve, and they were ready to blend with him, but Diotrephes could neither blend with John nor with other labourers. We might say, to speak according to the type before us, that one prince cannot supply a waggon; it needs two as a matter of divine adequacy. A real furthering of the Lord's work depends on the blending of interest and labour. There is not only mutual help in being yoke-fellows, but there is in it a wholesome check upon the tendency to become too individual in service. The "princes" evidently had no wish to individualise themselves; they thought it advantageous to co-operate. How important it is locally that those who work the work of the Lord should co-operate—that it should be manifest that there is a true pulling together! It may involve what seems to be a certain restraint, but this will be

found to be wholesome and even beneficial when it is accepted as the will of the Lord. It is evident that the principles embodied in the offering of "waggons" were such as pleased God. "Take it of them", He says to Moses. He loved to appropriate into His service such an offering.

The true tabernacle has been pitched and anointed; now it is left to us to offer. The first exercise of true leaders in every locality would be that movements of spiritual progress should be furthered — that Levites should not be impeded but helped. Such an exercise tends to the liberation of levitical service. "Waggons" are not the service; they do not exactly form part of the spiritual system, but they become accessory to it. They were constant evidence that the Levites' work was in the hearts of all Israel, and that all were concerned that it should be carried on as easily as possible. The Corinthians had a very degraded idea of the work of the Lord; *they* took it up as something to give prominence to themselves, and some amongst them thought Paul was on, the same line, and that they could exalt themselves by disparaging him. But he says, "Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1). He would have them to connect the service with Christ and with God; nothing was of any account in their servants but their faithfulness to the holy trust committed to them.

If the saints generally have high regard for the work of the Lord it tends to elevate the standard of all service, and to give it spiritual dignity. Those who labour should realise that the eyes of all Israel are on them, and that all regard the service as deeply important and holy; it is indeed rendered on behalf of all Israel (see chapter 8:9 - 11). This would make every Levite feel the need of maintaining purity and wave-offering character as being hallowed to God for His holy service.

The work of the Lord is being carried on amongst us, the ministry of Christ. It secures the bringing in of new material, and also the development and increase of what is there. Now are we set to facilitate that holy work? Every local company should follow the spiritual lead of the "princes", each contributing something that would answer to "waggons". Zephaniah says, "that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one shoulder" (Zephaniah 3:9, margin). That is a word to note: all putting their strength into one collective shoulder so that the work of the Lord is energetically promoted. It is not to be a casual matter with any of us. Little things may either help or hinder the work of the Lord. Let us see that we do not add to the burden, but that we do all possible to make it go easily and smoothly.

Then "the dedication-gift of the altar" is most important; the account of it fills no less than seventy-nine verses. The Spirit of God had pleasure in detailing what each prince offered on each of the twelve days. There was precisely the same kind of lead given on each day; every tribe had a prince who brought what was equal to what the other eleven princes brought. The divine thought being that in every local assembly the spontaneous response should come up to the same measure, so that there might be in each an offering worthy of the anointed altar. There was not only *unity* in offering, but *uniformity*, and this is spiritually important. The saints are all to "say the same thing" in teaching (1 Corinthians 1:10); the customs of the assemblies are to be uniform (1 Corinthians 11:16); and we learn here that as regards approach and offering at the altar it is pleasurable to God that there should be uniformity amongst all His people.

The altar has been anointed and hallowed; there is nothing to be added on that side; it was Moses' part to do that. A place and way of approach to God has been provided through Christ, and on the ground of His death, and by the Spirit, which is wholly apart from everything that is of the flesh. It depends on what has been brought in by Christ as Mediator; the whole of its service is sustained by Him as Priest; but then there comes in also the active and holy exercises of the brethren. The altar does not actually come into use until we dedicate it. Many believers have never presented "the dedication-gift of the altar"; that is our side. In the type before us there was a lead given by the princes to every tribe of Israel that was according to the divine thought. There were days of holy offering in which the service was in keeping with the altar. Such is the character of spiritual leading which "princes" give in every local assembly, all are governed by the thought of the service due to such an altar, and to Him whose altar it is.

This is a unique offering, and therefore of special interest, and it is noticeable that the first things offered were silver and gold vessels. The first thought suggested to us in relation to the dedication of the altar is that of suitable vessels, involving spiritual value and weight. The weight of the vessels is given, not their size. God's balances are always in action to weigh us. One who does not say much may be a weighty vessel; a man of many words may be really a light vessel. And it is also evident that the material of which silver and gold vessels are made has been subjected to a refining process. It is only as the dross is taken from the silver that there "cometh forth a vessel for the refiner" (Proverbs 25:4). The silver vessels represent saints viewed as redeemed to God, and therefore having divine value. What we are naturally does not enter into this; we are not vessels for the service of God on the footing of the flesh, or nature, but as being in the value of the death of Christ.

As redeemed ones the preciousness of Christ attaches to us (1 Peter 2:7); we are "priests to his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6); "we have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

But there could be no "silver dish" or "silver bowl" apart from refining to bring about purity in its substance, and also a fashioning process by which the vessel is formed to the pleasure of the refiner. So in the epistle to the Hebrews we see that the saints, sanctified and perfected for ever by the offering of Christ, come under divine chastening with a view to their being partakers of God's holiness. The saints, on their part, are to pursue holiness, and purify themselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit. Indeed Scripture is full of holy admonitions and exhortations which, as taken up in exercise and by the Spirit, would cause that the dross would be taken from the silver. The Lord baptising by fire brings refining power into the souls of His people, and its effect is to eliminate in a practical way all that has the nature of dross.

We learn from 2 Timothy 2:20 that those who have the character of "gold and silver" vessels are responsible to maintain purity in their associations. This is essential in view of any kind of holy service. A mixed condition of things, such as is found in "a great house" where vessels to honour are found along with vessels to dishonour is not agreeable to the Lord. Therefore everyone who names the Name of the Lord is called upon to withdraw from iniquity, and to purify himself from vessels to dishonour in separating himself from them. There are vessels to honour in the Christian profession, men who love the Lord and seek to honour Him, but alas! they are to be found sometimes in association with those who are really vessels to dishonour. To remain in such an association is really to imperil their own title to be regarded as vessels to honour, for it is of the one who has purified himself in separating from vessels to dishonour that it is said, "he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work".

It is intimated in Numbers 7:13 that there are vessels of different form and weight. The "silver dish" has not the same form as the "silver bowl", and the weight of the two differs considerably. This appears to suggest a divine apportionment in sovereignty, for I think that divine grace and faithfulness would be set forth in silver rather than different measures of human faithfulness. Every holy vessel has a capacity and form which is divinely assigned; and one of our most important exercises is to come up to our divinely allotted measure. We cannot go beyond it, but there is a real danger that we may not come up to it in practical suitability for holy service. Each has an assigned place in the dispensation of God which is in faith; our

responsibility is to be diligently and prayerfully exercised not to come short of what is allotted to us.

There is obvious need of refining and purity for vessels which are to be presented before the altar "full of fine flour mingled with oil for an oblation". For "fine flour mingled with oil" is typical of the holy humanity of the Lord Jesus. How could any one be suitable to bring *that* to God in an acceptable way apart from refining? Malachi 3:3,4 has an important bearing on this.

The "fine flour mingled with oil" refers to what Christ was even from His birth. He was conceived through the Holy Spirit coming upon the virgin, and the power of the Highest overshadowing her (Luke 1: 31,35). It was said to Joseph by the angel "that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). This would answer to "*mingled* with oil"; it is more than anointed (see note to Leviticus 2:4 in New Translation); the latter term applies to what He was officially as anointed with power for service, but "*mingled* with oil" typifies what He was personally and characteristically. His humanity was unique in its origin and character. Not only was He sinless — *that* an unfallen creature might be through God's election — but He was a divine Person come in flesh. Though in the likeness of flesh of sin, His body was prepared by God in a miraculous and divine way; the Holy Spirit gave character to His humanity. A saint may be "filled with the Holy Spirit", and of Jesus it is said that He was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). But when these expressions are used, the saint, or even the Lord Jesus, is viewed as in vessel character. But in the case of the Lord not only was the Vessel full, but the Vessel itself was the product of the divine power of the Holy Spirit, and was permeated by that power. So that, though truly Man, and taking part in flesh and blood, He was in every way unique.

The detail of that incomparable life was set forth in its even balance of every moral perfection in the "fine flour" of the oblation, and all was "mingled with Oil". Not one detail in that wondrous life, from His conception in the womb of the virgin to His offering Himself without spot to God upon the cross, can be rightly viewed save as recognising that there was a mingling of the Holy Spirit with it. Every feature of human excellence was there, but blended with the Holy Spirit, so that we contemplate every part of His perfection in manhood as apprehending that the Holy Spirit "mingled" with it all. In due time, at "about thirty years old", He was sealed and anointed, but from His holy conception there had been what answered to the "fine flour mingled with oil" in the type. To see this would preserve us from thinking that He was ever, save as a sacrifice for sin upon the cross, in any personal or relative position save one of perfect complacency and delight to God.

Then the princes also offered "one cup of ten shekels of gold, full of incense" (verse 14). Gold is a symbol of what is divine, so that a cup of gold would refer to a vessel which can be viewed as entirely God's creation in Christ. "If any one be in Christ there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new: and all things are of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17,18). The new man, which saints are regarded as having put on, is a divine creation, and is "according to God". As in new creation the saints are of God, and only as thus viewed abstractedly — that is, apart from all that we are naturally or as in the flesh — could we be symbolised by a vessel of gold. But it must be remembered that what we are as a new creation in Christ Jesus is a great reality; it is that which is to subsist eternally; and it is our privilege to abstract ourselves by the Spirit's power from everything else, and to view ourselves according to what we are in new creation. It is only in nearness to God that we can truly do this, and it is not without significance that the cup of gold is only "of ten shekels". It seems to intimate that the more precious thoughts of God are not secured on the responsive side in a vessel of large dimensions. But they *are* secured in such a way that the fragrance of them is brought to Him. I think we might say that in the prayers of Paul in Ephesians 1 and 3 we have what corresponds with the incense in a vessel of gold. Paul could take up the most precious thoughts of God in regard to Christ and the saints, and present them in an intercessory way. But in so doing he views the saints as on earth in responsibility; all prayer necessarily does so, and this may be intimated in the "ten" shekels. While still here the saints are to be brought into the intelligence of the full thought of God in regard to them. The linking of this thought with the altar gives a very elevated and extended thought of altar service; we should have been inclined to connect incense more with the golden altar, but it is not seen in that setting here. There is evidently instruction in this.

Then in verse 16 we come to apprehensions of Christ in sacrificial character. "One young bullock, one ram, one yearling (or male) lamb, for a burnt-offering". It will be noticed that these are not offerings which are brought as a result of individual exercises like those in the early chapters of Leviticus. In those chapters the different animals which are brought seem to indicate different measures of apprehension of Christ according to the spiritual stature and wealth of the offerer. But here they seem to set forth rather different views of Christ which are all normal in their place, and which have *all* to be brought if the altar is to be suitably furnished; that is, if assembly praise is to have its full scope. The bullock is the largest of the clean animals, and it suggests the *greatness* of Christ personally as giving character and value to His offering. The ram would present in type His *devotedness* to God in full

consecration. The bullock appears in His saying, "I come", but the ram would set forth His intense devotion to God and to His saints such as we see typified in the Hebrew servant of Exodus 21. While the lamb clearly suggests Christ in all His preciousness as the *suffering* One (Isaiah 53).

"One buck of the goats for a sin-offering". The solemn dealing with sin is here the great single thought. It is Christ viewed as the Forsaken One, but as such securing the glory and praise of God (Psalm 22). There are not in this, varied types to set forth different aspects, it is just the one unfathomable thought that the One who knew no sin was made sin for us. This is different from the sin-offerings of Leviticus 4, Leviticus 5 which are brought to meet the case of specific sins of individuals or of the congregation. Here it is more in character like the sin-offering of the day of atonement — sin dealt with for the glory of God as the basis of all that He does in sovereign love. The offerings of the princes have all Israel in view; they are, in each case, general in their bearing, not individual; they speak of apprehensions of Christ which are to have place in relation to the service of God in each local assembly.

But when the peace-offerings come into view we find increased numbers — two and five — and four different animals are offered. When the thought comes in of "food" or "bread" for God, and for His priests and people, the types are extended and diversified. Communion with the altar has a very special place in the mind of God, and large provision is made for it by those who enter into His mind. This would have in view the setting up and preservation of holy conditions. If we enjoy what is of God we cannot enjoy what pertains to the idolatrous world (see 1 Corinthians 10). God would have furnished in abundance in every locality that which would nourish the affections of His people so that they become constitutionally different from the world.

It will be noticed that all the offerings in verses 15 - 17 are males, denoting energy of apprehension. Feeble thoughts of Christ are, alas! only too common amongst the people of God, but "princes" indicate persons who have vigorous spirituality, and who can give a lead in bringing to the anointed altar what is suitable. Our "spiritual sacrifices" are to be offered "by Jesus Christ;" they are to be "acceptable to God" by Him. Then let us not be content with feeble apprehensions of Christ; let us be concerned to follow the lead of the "princes", and to bring strong and varied thoughts of Christ for God's delight, and to enrich the fellowship of His saints!

The closing verse of the chapter presents most beautifully the character of approach which follows upon the dedication-gift of the altar being presented. Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with God. Connecting it morally,

as the Spirit of God surely intends it to be connected, he goes in from the dedicated altar, his heart full of all the wealth of what has been offered, to speak with God. Speaking with God implies intelligence — not only having precious thoughts, but the ability to put them into words which are suitable to be uttered in the ear of God. How perfectly can Christ do this! He can move from the altar to the sanctuary in all the fragrance of what has been offered, but if He moves thus it is in view of all His own going in also to speak with God. No angel or seraph could speak to God as Christ can speak to Him, and it is that character of speaking which can be now taken up by the saints who form the assembly. In the tent of meeting God is spoken to by His spiritual people in a way that pleases Him.

What is set forth in the speaking of Moses to God is not exactly prayer, nor even the expression of thanksgiving, but holy converse. This is the highest privilege that could be conferred upon an intelligent creature. On the holy mount Moses and Elias “talked with him”. What liberty! What sacred intimacy! And if we speak with God, He will surely speak to us. So Moses “heard the voice speaking to him from off the mercy-seat which was upon the ark of testimony”. The full privilege of the assembly is not realised if we do not hear the voice of God. Blessed as it is to speak with Him, it is yet more blessed that He should speak to us. He loves to answer what we say by some fresh communication. We should look for this.

But this precious verse carries us even further. God’s communications to us would never, under normal conditions, have the effect of silencing us; they would give us further subject-matter for a continuation of our speaking to Him. So that we read, finally, “and he spoke to Him”. The meeting did not end, if we may so say, by the Voice speaking from the mercy-seat. Moses spoke again to God in answer to the Voice. This would suggest to us that it is hardly suitable that a word from the Lord should be quite at the end of a meeting, but rather at a time when it may minister to our further speaking to God.

The whole of this chapter is most important instruction for us in view of the service of God in the assembly today.

NUMBERS 8

Numbers 8

Two things are brought before us in this book as taking place when the tabernacle service was inaugurated: namely, the dedication of the altar and the lighting of the lamps of the candlestick. They are to be specially noted as bringing out what is in the mind of God with regard to His service as carried on in wilderness conditions. The one, which we have considered in looking at chapter 7, speaks of movements of heart Godward on the part of His people, all of which concern Christ in His personal perfection and His sacrifice. The other, which now comes before us, shows how provision has been made for Christ as the risen and glorified One being kept brightly in the view of those who love Him during the night of His rejection here, and while He is personally at the right hand of God.

That this is the object in view is made clear by Jehovah's words, "When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick" (verse 2). The candlestick itself was to be illuminated by the light of the seven lamps; it typifies Christ as He may be known now by spiritual light being shed upon Him. It suggests that He will only be seen as thus illuminated; so that the candlestick is a "figurative representation" of Christ as He may be known during the night of His rejection here; it is a type of Him which is distinctive of the present period.

There is a difference between Christ as the Light and as the Candlestick. He came into the world as light, and was the true light for every man for "a little while" (John 12:35). We might truly say that the Sun was shining when He was here, but, being rejected, the night period has followed, and Christ, instead of shining publicly as the Sun, as He will do when the millennial day dawns, is now known in the holy place as the Candlestick. But He is only seen there as the lamps shed light upon Him.

The first great service of Christ, after He took His priestly place at the right hand of God as the "minister of the holy places and of the true tabernacle" (Hebrews 8:1,2), was to light the lamps. He had previously prepared the lamps by His service of grace amongst His own in the days of His flesh and in resurrection, but in pouring out the Holy Spirit upon them He filled them with oil and lighted them. It was the fulfilment of His own words, and of the promise of the Father. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes forth from with the Father, *he* shall bear witness concerning me; and ye too hear witness because ye are with me from the beginning" (John 15:26,27). "But I say the truth to you, It is

profitable for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go I will send Him to you ... He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you. All things that the Father has are mine; on account of this I have said that he receives of mine and shall announce it to you" (John 16:7; John 16:14,15).

The lamps have now been lighted by the true Aaron as risen and glorified, and the Holy Spirit has ever since been shedding divine light upon Christ as the Candlestick. Whatever light shines now to glorify Christ shines by the Spirit through His saints. Apart from the lamps there would be nothing to bring the Candlestick into view, for it typifies a Christ who is in heaven, but nevertheless brought into glorious view down here by the present ministry of the Holy Spirit through His saints. What wondrous light shone in the ministry of the apostles and prophets! But let us not forget that the same Spirit who inspired the Gospels and the Epistles remains here in living activity to glorify Christ through the intelligent affections of His saints. In the light of the type before us we see that it is the outcome of His love acting in a priestly way, and that it is the will of God that it should be so.

The Candlestick was in "the tent of meeting". This suggests that the lamps giving their light upon the Candlestick is to be regarded as standing in connection with the saints being assembled together. As thus assembled, in separation from the world and in holy conditions, the privilege of the sanctuary may be known, and one of the most distinctive features of the sanctuary is the Candlestick seen as radiant in the light of the seven lamps. Do we understand that we are in a time that is marked by the assembling of saints together (Hebrews 10:25), and that, as thus assembled, we may confidently expect the disclosure to us in divine and spiritual light of the glory of Christ? It has been witnessed through apostles and prophets, but it remains in the "tent of meeting" in a living way.

It will be noticed that there is no mention of morning and evening here, no thought of a recurrent service as in Exodus 30, but simply the fact that Aaron lighted the lamps by Jehovah's commandment. It is not suggested that they would ever go out or be put out. No snuffers are mentioned here; the lamps are seen as lighted by Christ, and they are not contemplated as marked by dimness or defect. It is the presentation according to the mind of God of an abiding characteristic of the testimony: the lamps which Christ has lighted are to continue to shine until He comes again.

The spiritual instruction of the dedication-gift of the altar is that it is pleasing to God that such a character of offering should go right through the period of tabernacle service; the twelve days being a complete administrative period.

And in the lighting of the lamps we see, typically, that Christ has inaugurated a shining of divine light here on earth in which He will continue to be glorified until He comes again. It is what subsists in virtue of the presence here of the Comforter. These things bring out what characterises the present period according to the mind of God. It is for us to see that we understand them, and that we are carrying on the offering service, and in mind and affection appreciating the Spirit's witness to Christ, and identified with it as the vessels through whom it shines. Only thus shall we understand the testimony of God today.

From verse 6 we are instructed as to the cleansing and offering of the Levites for the service of Jehovah. "And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them; sprinkle upon them water of purification from sin; and they shall pass the razor over all their flesh, and shall wash their garments, and make themselves clean". No one can rightly take up levitical service except as having gone through the exercises which are set forth in a typical way in this chapter. So that it requires serious attention from all who acknowledge — as all Christians should — that they are definitely called to serve God in relation to His holy things. The Levites were taken "instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel" (verse 18). All who have been passed over by judgment on account of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ are hallowed to God; their service is not optional, it is righteously due. And we see here how the Levites, as representing all the firstborn, are cleansed, how atonement is made for them, and how they are offered as a wave-offering.

We may remark, first of all, how prominent in this chapter are types of the death of Christ. Babies in Christ can say with deepest thankfulness, "Christ died for us". It is by the appreciation of this great and wondrous fact that the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts at the very commencement of our spiritual life. In one sense the whole value of that death in all its varied aspects and bearings is for us from the very beginning. But "Christ died for us", is a statement which continually unfolds more and more of its blessed meaning to the heart of the believer. And the types are of the utmost importance as setting forth in divine wisdom the varied lights in which God would have us to apprehend and appreciate the death of His Son. The typical teaching of the Old Testament enables us to perceive clearly — if we have vision by the Spirit to do so — and to distinguish, different aspects of a death which is unspeakably profound in every way, but of which many aspects need to be known if we are to be spiritually intelligent, and made competent for the

holy service of God. The chapter before us is most instructive as to this, for it teaches that in order to be qualified as Levites "twenty-five years old" for "labour in the work of the service of the tent of meeting", we need to have a definite apprehension of the death of Christ in four different aspects: the passover lamb, the red heifer, the bullock of sin-offering, the bullock of burnt-offering. Connected with the latter is the oblation of fine flour mingled with oil, but I do not dwell on this at present.

The passover lamb is referred to in verses 17,18. Jehovah says, "all the firstborn ... are mine ... I hallowed them to myself". Every Levite understood that he was taken instead of a firstborn hallowed to God in all the value of the Passover lamb. We can only rightly serve as having the consciousness that God has hallowed us on the ground of the death of Christ for Himself and His holy service. Paul, a true Levite, says, "God whose I am and whom I serve".

Then the "water of purification from sin" (verse 7) is connected with the red heifer of Numbers 19. The red heifer was wholly burned outside the camp; "its skin and its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall he burn". There is no more complete type of Christ as coming under the all-consuming judgment of sin. But what specially marks this type is that "the priest shall take cedar-wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the burning of the heifer". All that is great and excellent in man, or that man might esteem to be such, is set forth in the cedar-wood. The hyssop represents what is lowly and small in appearance; the natural man sometimes seeks to gain credit by self-depreciation and what Scripture calls "doing his own will in humility", but this is only another, though subtle, form of self-righteousness. Lastly, the scarlet symbolises that in which a man might glory as giving him distinction, and who that knows his own heart is unaware of the readiness of the flesh to pride itself in almost anything; nothing is too insignificant to be made into a bit of scarlet. Even divine gift or service or privilege may turn to self-exaltation. What a lesson then it is for the Levite to learn that in the judgment-bearing of Christ *everything* connected with man after the flesh has been cast into the burning! In being sprinkled with "water of purification from sin" we are brought under an application in the power of the Spirit of what has been effected in the judgment-bearing and death of Christ. We need a purification that is suitable for the tabernacle and sanctuary of Jehovah, that is according to God's estimate of what is needed for His holy service. Such a purification could only really be effected in completeness by the death of Christ.

Everything connected with sinful flesh has been divinely judged in that death. Not only those things which the conscience of man could take account of, but a thousand things in which men see no harm, or even commend as good, but

which under God's eye are a defilement to His sanctuary where He dwells in holiness.

It is to be noted that persons were not washed in the "water of purification"; it was always sprinkled upon them. There is a difference in Scripture between washing and sprinkling which it is important to notice. The prominent thought conveyed in *washing* is the effect produced by it; for example, "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). But *sprinkling* on persons, or on the altar, etc., indicates that they come under the value of what is sprinkled, whether it be blood or water. Attention is directed to the import and value in itself of what is sprinkled. Sprinkling with water of purification is thus really a greater thought than moral cleansing, for it suggests all the import from the divine side of what is sprinkled. It conveys the thought of a purification that is absolute in character, for it carries all the import of what has been really effected in the death of Christ viewed as typified by the red heifer, and now applied to us in a personal way in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Levitical service is not to be entered on otherwise than as having been sprinkled by water of purification from sin. Only thus are we suitable for the service of the tent of meeting. The Spirit of God would give us a great sense of the holiness of that service, and also that everything that would defile the sanctuary has been judged in the death of Christ. Purification for the service of God is in the value of that; anything that came short of it would not do. If we have not understood it let us pray about it. If that sprinkling is upon us by the Spirit it will be a divine starting point in our souls of all the exercises which bring about moral cleansing, and a practical holiness which is suited to the service of God.

So that, immediately following upon the sprinkling, we read, "and they shall pass the razor over all their flesh". This is something which *they* have to do, and it is of a sharp and drastic nature, It signifies the practical disallowance and removal of all that which is the outcome of the flesh, and this, perhaps, more particularly in those features which are naturally attractive, and in which the flesh might pride itself. It is the truth of what is set forth from the divine side in the water of purification applied practically by the Holy Spirit through personal exercise so that there is an effective dealing in a summary way with all that is the outcome of our flesh. The character of the purification that is suitable to the sanctuary has been learned under the sprinkling, and the razor passing over the flesh secures practical correspondence with it. Nothing that has gone into the burning of the heifer is retained as though it could have any part in the service of God.

Then they "shall wash their garments, and make themselves clean". The garments are what mark us externally, and they set forth our habits and associations, we might say our general manner of life. All has to be cleansed in view of the new life on which the Levite is about to enter. If we thought, on the one hand, of the import of the death of Christ, and, on the other, of being a wave-offering for the pleasure and service of God, would it not necessitate the washing of our garments? How many unprofitable habits would be at once abandoned! How many unspiritual links would be severed! How many companionships and associations would be at once felt to be unsuitable if viewed in the light of what we are called to be as Levites!

There are further types of the death of Christ in the two bullocks to be taken according to verse 8, and upon which the Levites had to lay their hands as in verse 12. It is very impressive that these special aspects of the death of Christ should be brought before us. For these offerings stand in direct connection with the taking up of holy service; they are "to make atonement *for the Levites*". What pains God takes to fill us with thoughts of Christ! He would remind us continually of that blessed One, and of His death. It is not here the one who has sinned laying his hand on Christ that he may be forgiven, as in Leviticus 4. It is a company just about to take up the holy service of God who are instructed that they can only do so as identified with Christ in sin-offering and burnt-offering character. *They* are to take the two young bullocks. A large and vigorous apprehension of Christ in the two-fold character of sin-offering and burnt-offering is essential in view of service. There is to be nothing feeble or uncertain as to the ground on which we are offered to God as Levites. We are to be fully and consciously identified with Christ as having borne the judgment of sin, and as having glorified God so that we are accepted in the sweet odour of His offering. We are on that ground *levitically*; it underlies and gives quality and value to every movement of service in the tent of meeting. We thus serve in a profound sense of liberty and acceptance, for our own personal relations with God are according to the precious worth of Christ and of His offering. If we get away in our service from the consciousness of this, we shall lose our liberty and stability. God would have us to serve as those who can ever say in profound gladness of heart,

"Love, that no suffering stayed
We'll praise, true love divine;
Love that for us atonement made,
Love that has made us Thine". (235:2)

"And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tent of meeting; and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel. And thou shalt bring the

Levites before Jehovah; and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites" (verses 9,10). Levitical service is thus clearly a matter which concerns "the whole assembly"; all are to recognise it, and to be identified with it, for it is a service rendered on behalf of all, as we see in verse 9, and representative of what is due from all. God looks that "the whole assembly" shall be thoroughly identified with all levitical service that is rendered amongst them. And the service is taken up in the consciousness that it is really "the service of the children of Israel". God would preserve in all His servants the sense that they serve in relation to "the whole assembly". No levitical service can be rightly taken up in independency, or as being only a personal responsibility. Neither is it the sectional interest of a particular class.

Individual responsibility rightly enters into all service, but every Levite has to learn that he must serve in unity with all his fellow-servants, and that he and they serve in the tent of meeting as performing a service that is due from all the children of Israel, and that it derives its true character from the fact that the whole assembly is identified with it. What a consideration for every servant! He must take account of "the whole assembly", and bear in mind that true levitical service is of such a character that all the people of God can fully identify themselves with it. It may be asked, How can we take account of "the whole assembly" today, when saints are so hopelessly divided and scattered? Well, we may be sure that all the failure that has come in has not altered God's mind as to how things should be done, or the order that He would have to be observed in relation to His holy service. Numbers 8 is the word of God to us today; we are under obligation to recognise that what is here laid down is divine order. Faith would hold to it as the mind of God, and would seek to be regulated by it in practice so far as possible, whatever the general conditions around may be. We may depend upon it that divine principles and order can be maintained, even in the darkest day, though it may only be "two or three" who are set to do so. God is at present giving much exercise to His people in regard to His mind, and also the desire to give effect to it in a practical way, even though in much outward weakness. Wherever two or three saints walk together in separation from what is not of God, they can act, by His grace and by the Spirit's power, in the light of every divine principle, and in this way return to His original order.

"And Aaron shall offer the Levites as a wave-offering before Jehovah from the children of Israel, and they shall perform the service of Jehovah" (verse 11). Four times in this chapter the Levites are spoken of as a "wave-offering". God loves to regard them as a choice offering from His people generally which He can appropriate with peculiar pleasure. "That the Levites may be mine" (verse 14). The children of Israel represent the whole company of saints viewed as

providing a wave-offering which is accepted by God on their behalf. The Levites represent the same company, but viewed as in wave-offering character, and presented to God for His holy service.

It is to be further noticed that "thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons ... And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons ... And afterwards the Levites came in to perform their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron, and before his sons" (verses 13,19,22). See also chapter 4:5 - 9,19,27,33, where we learn that the Levites had to perform all their service under the direction of the priests. This makes evident that the levitical must be ever subordinate to what is priestly, and must serve so as to minister to it. This is a most important divine principle. The priests represent spiritual intelligence as found in persons who draw near to God, and consider for Him. It is that element which is to direct all levitical service, and which all true levitical service will tend to promote. Not that, as applied to ourselves, the priest would be one person and the Levite another though it might often be so in a practical sense. But the priestly element in each one is to take precedence of the levitical, and to give direction to it. Thus will every detail of the levitical service be carried out in a spiritual manner, so as to answer to the mind of God and be pleasurable to Him. An example of the priestly and the levitical being found in one person may be seen in Epaphras. The "faithful minister of Christ for you", is Epaphras the Levite; "always combating earnestly for you in prayers", is Epaphras the priest (Colossians 1:7; Colossians 4:12).

The closing verses of the chapter concern the period of levitical service. In chapter 4 the Levites are numbered "from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old". This would appear to be the time of mature and competent service. But in this chapter it is said, "from twenty-five years old and upward shall he come to labour in the work of the service of the tent of meeting" (verse 24). This seems to indicate that God's mind is that the competency of His servants will be developed as they actually serve. They do not come up to matured efficiency without experience in the actual work. So that the first five years is a kind of apprenticeship period, during which they are in training, in view of coming up to the full standard of suitability to the service. Prayer and the study of the Scriptures and some measure of divine gift are essential for every servant, but they will not make him thoroughly competent without actual experience in the work of the Lord.

It will be observed that the Israelites were numbered for military service from twenty years of age, but Levites do not begin to serve in the tent of meeting until they are twenty-five. Twenty years old indicates a manhood that is competent for the defence of the testimony in a military sense-the manhood

that will fit one to be a soldier. But twenty-five years old conveys the thought of increased development, particularly on the line of sobriety and intelligence, so as to be able to handle holy things with discretion and care, This is needed for levitical service. And then thirty years old speaks of one who is matured in competency as a result, of actual experience in the work. How full of instruction is all this!

Then "from fifty years old" the Levite retires "from the labour of the service, and shall serve no more; but he shall minister with his brethren in the tent of meeting, and keep the charge" (verses 25,26). Three different thoughts come before the mind in this connection. First, it seems to indicate that levitical service is to be marked by full competency, and that no features of decline or decrepitude are to appear in it. It suggests the maintenance of a high standard of efficiency, in a spiritual sense, as being the only thing suitable in the service of God. Secondly, it conveys an impression of a time limit to active service. We should labour in the sense of this all the time. Even the Lord said, "I must work the works of him that has sent me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). Each of us has his "day" of service; it will soon be over; how important to fill it up rightly! The Levite had the sense all the time that he had a measured period in which to serve, and that the time was coming when it would close. J.B.S. said to me that he felt it to be a solemn moment when he realised that his active labours were over. Our allotted period of service here in the tent of meeting will soon be over, and we shall never have another opportunity for that service. How the Lord filled up His "day"! Mark's gospel presents Him in the unremitting service and devotion of the true Levite.

But a third thought seems to be also suggested in this scripture: namely, that when arduous labour is no longer permitted to the Levite he retains an honourable place of ministry with his brethren, and keeps the charge. He is not degraded but rather dignified. Some, by the favour of the Lord, never seem to get past "fifty years old"; they retain vigorous ability for active and energetic labour to the end. But usually in the actual experience of the wilderness — which is here in view — there comes a time when strenuous toil is no longer possible; it has to be left to younger servants. But how precious is the grace that still permits an aged, and perhaps invalid, Levite — brother or sister — to "minister with his brethren in the tent of meeting, and keep the charge". He is not dismissed as of no value; he is retained in the ministry of the tent of meeting; he is regarded as one who cherishes all the interests of the service in a peculiar way, for he is to "keep the charge".

Peter, knowing that the putting off of his tabernacle is speedily to take place, and Paul the aged, a prisoner at Rome, feeling that he has combated the good combat and finished the race, are both found, in a most devoted and diligent way, keeping the charge. It is really a very fine way for the individual servant to finish his course in the wilderness. We have known beloved servants in our own day who have reached years when active labour had to cease, but who continued to the very end to keep the charge. I was one of the last persons to hear C.H.M. pray. It was most touching to hear the aged and feeble Levite pouring out his heart to God, first for the whole assembly, and then for the little companies gathered everywhere to the Lord's Name. The Lord's interests were the great burden of his heart. Though he had been for a length of time incapacitated for any public service he was still keeping the charge.

The Lord indicates to us in the beautiful instruction with which this chapter closes that He has taken into account the whole possible course of His Levites. Not only their energetic activities, but the time when they must needs "retire from the labour of the service". But He contemplates them as still thoroughly imbued with the levitical spirit, as still ministering with their brethren, and as keeping the charge. He can trust them still with all the interests of His service.

So this chapter gives us the whole history of the Levites from their cleansing and being offered as a wave-offering at the outset to the end which we may all contemplate as in wilderness conditions. How beautifully the end corresponds with the beginning! May the consideration of it stimulate us all to take up, and go right through with, "the service of the tent of meeting"!

NUMBERS 9

Numbers 9

It is necessary to note the dates in this book, for they are important, and have spiritual significance. In point of time the people kept the passover according to Numbers 9 before they were numbered as in chapters 1 and 3. The tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in "the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt". Then followed the twelve days during which the altar was dedicated, according to chapter 7. Then the lamps were lighted, and the Levites cleansed and offered for the service of the tent of meeting. Then on the fourteenth day the passover was to be held. And on the first day of the second month the numbering took place. It is necessary to be with God in relation to His system, and to hold the Passover in that connection, before we can be taken account of for military service.

The passover as held in the wilderness was the first commemorative Passover, and it was held by a people surrounding the tabernacle, and committed definitely to the holy service of God which had been inaugurated. So that it is seen here in an altogether different setting from Exodus 12; it is here "the offering of Jehovah" (verses 7,13), which seems to suggest entering into it according to its preciousness to God. It is an "offering" acceptable to Him as dwelling amongst His people. So that in the wilderness God speaks of the passover as "My sacrifice" and "my feast" (Exodus 23:18; Exodus 34:25). He appreciates it as the ground on which He can have His people near Himself. And in this connection "the fat" is spoken of, which is not mentioned in Egypt, speaking of the inward excellence and perfection of Christ, reserved to be God's peculiar portion and delight. A people in covenant relations with God, having His sanctuary in their midst, are able to hold the passover in a sense of what it is to Him.

The passover enlarges according to the position from which it is viewed. When Moses first kept it it was "that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them", but we have seen in Numbers 8 that the firstborn, as represented in the Levites, have now become "a wave-offering" wholly for God, and for His service. I take it that the Passover as referred to in 1 Corinthians 5 would be the passover in the wilderness aspect; that is, as held by the assembly of God in the midst of which He dwells.

But our attention is specially called in this scripture to the fact that there were abnormal conditions amongst the people of God. "And there were men who were unclean through the dead body of a man, and could not hold the passover on that day" (verse 6). No such exercise as this was contemplated in

Egypt; it arose by reason of the fact that the tabernacle and sanctuary of Jehovah were among them; they had been brought to the abode of God's holiness. His people must be suitable to *that*. A man unclean by a dead body, and not purified, defiled the tabernacle (chapter 19). These men were conscious of this, and it gave them so much exercise that they came before Moses and before Aaron about it.

It is a good sign when the conscience is tender as to what is suitable to God. I wonder how far that is our standard! There are a thousand things around us which are not considered evil by men of the world, or even by many professing Christians, which to a sensitive conscience are like the touch of a dead body. Evidently Moses recognised a fine sensitiveness in these men, and was assured that their exercises would have Jehovah's attention. "Stay, and I will hear what Jehovah commands concerning you". Their case was really of immense importance, and particularly for ourselves, for it brought out that God could provide for abnormal conditions amongst His people, and secure, even with reference to such conditions, what was due to Himself, and what the faith and love of His people desired.

We have to admit that conditions amongst the people of God are very abnormal today. There is much that corresponds with the unclean state in which these men were found; what is required under such circumstances is the exercise of an honest and good heart. These men had sensitive consciences as to the uncleanness, but they had also true desire of heart to keep the passover. "We are unclean by reason of the dead body of a man: why are we kept back, that we may not present the offering of Jehovah at its set time among the children of Israel"? (verse 7). I think we may say that they had been rightly affected by the covenant, and by the holy order of the tabernacle; they were impressed with the need for suitability, and they judged of it by a divine standard. It is a wholesome and healthy exercise, which God would encourage in His people.

But then, on the other hand, they greatly valued the privilege of presenting "the offering of Jehovah at its set time among the children of Israel". Surely there was some divine way of meeting their disability, so that they might not be deprived of a privilege which they greatly desired as lovers of Jehovah? It was an appeal to the consideration of God which He would not disregard. It brought out a gracious provision which formed no part of the original order — an excess of grace which could only appear under abnormal conditions. The exercises and desires of these men must have been peculiarly pleasing to God. They felt keenly their state of uncleanness, but they knew God well enough to rise above it into the greatness of His grace. "Why are we kept back?" Their

hearts urged them on to "present the offering of Jehovah". Could He say that He had no provision for such a state of things? His whole course of dealing with His people had been the blessed witness that He *could* meet in grace the most abnormal conditions, and glorify Himself in doing it. Would He now be at a loss how to act for men who were unclean, but whose hearts, nevertheless, longed to present His offering? Surely not! One great lesson of this book is that God *can* meet every condition that arises amongst His people. He can give a defiled Nazarite a new start; He will cause the ark to go before His people if Moses in unbelief wants Hobab for eyes; He will make the murmurings to cease by setting up priesthood; He will provide for purifying uncleanness by the water of purification; He will answer the contention of the people by giving water from the rock when it was spoken to; He will meet the serpent's bite by the brazen serpent; He will answer the adversary of His people by Balaam's parables; if there are no sons He will give the inheritance to daughters; He will provide cities of refuge for the manslayer. The book is full of abounding grace, coming out through abnormal circumstances arising in the history of His people.

The faith of these men got behind the immediate circumstances to God, and secured from Him a provision that would hold good for all generations of His people. This is an important lesson for us to learn, for we are living in a day of abnormal conditions. Almost everything has to be taken up now on the line of "the second month" rather than the first. That is to say, the original divine order of the assembly, and the moral conditions which correspond with that order, have long been departed from, and a state of uncleanness has come into the Christian profession just as it did into Israel. The priests have failed to hallow themselves, and the people have not gathered together at the divine centre. But if the uncleanness is felt, and there is a desire to bring "the offering of Jehovah", a special provision remains in "the second month". It is a provision for disqualified persons, and for persons who have been "afar off". It speaks of an opportunity to be purified, and to return to that which has been departed from. So that "the second month" is a witness of that special grace in which God is now giving opportunity to His people to purify themselves so that they may "present the offering of Jehovah" in a suitable manner, notwithstanding the uncleanness and departure which have come in. There is opportunity to return from departure.

The Passover, as "the offering of Jehovah", is typical of what is due to God in His assembly. "The feast" stands immediately connected with it, which in this book is marked by a great wealth of offering — "the bread of the offering by fire of a sweet odour to Jehovah" (see Numbers 28:16 - 24). For us it would include taking up the privilege of the Lord's supper, and the service of praise

proper to the assembly. God is exercising His people today about these things, and awakening desire to present His offering. But this inevitably awakens concern about purification, and about a speedy return from being "afar off". The offering to be acceptable must be presented "according to the purification of the sanctuary", and "the second month" is a graciously given opportunity to secure this, even when abnormal conditions have come in.

But it supposes that there will be no delay in having the water of purification sprinkled (Numbers 19.), or in returning from "a journey afar off". The matter is not left over indefinitely; if an unclean Israelite failed to purify himself during the month of grace he would have to "bear his sin". This is a serious consideration.

We have also to see that the exercise as to purification comes to maturity. The state of things in Hezekiah's day is an encouragement, but it is also a serious warning. Hezekiah's heart was large, and there was a great response to his call to keep the Passover, but "there were many in the congregation that were not hallowed", and "had not cleansed themselves, and they ate the passover otherwise than it was written". This was not in accord with Numbers 9, and it brought God's judgment, though in answer to Hezekiah's prayer He "healed the people". God is exceedingly forbearing, as we have all abundantly proved, and He has regard to all who in any measure of reality direct their hearts to seek Him. He will forgive, or make atonement for, a good deal, where there is any true desire towards Him. We may be sure that it is so, and we can thank Him for it, for there is probably not one of us who does not need His forgiveness in this matter.

But at the same time we must remember that what He has to forgive, or make atonement for, *does not please Him*. Would we willingly go on with something which He has to forgive? This would, surely, not satisfy any of His true lovers! Such would never think of making His unfathomable grace an excuse for offering "otherwise than it was written". Let us remember that "the second month" is a divinely given opportunity for full restoration to conditions that are pleasing to God. Let us have no lower standard than "the purification of the sanctuary". Genuine and pious desires are acceptable, but something more is needed. We have to learn what "the purification of the sanctuary" is, and how to move according to it, even in taking up the privilege of presenting "the offering of Jehovah".

"And on the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle of the tent of testimony And when the cloud rose from the tent, then the children of Israel journeyed; and at the place where the cloud

stood still, there the children of Israel encamped" (verses 16 - 18). The Lord would give His people very great interest in "the cloud", and especially in the place which it has in directing their collective spiritual movements. It is mentioned fourteen times in Numbers 9, Numbers 10. This is a new form of guidance which was not known until the tabernacle was set up.

The cloud had been seen before as going before the people by day and by night to lead them in the way out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21,22). Its leading then was with tender consideration for a people who were not yet prepared to face conflict. In the early days of our spiritual history there is a divine leading which has regard to our weakness and inexperience, and the possibility of our being discouraged, and which takes us around to avoid "the way of the land of the Philistines". God has to teach us how to walk before we are prepared to fight (see Hosea 11:1 - 3). Then when the Egyptians pursued Israel "the pillar of the cloud went from before them, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel" (Exodus 14:19,20). It teaches that God is for us against all the power of the enemy.

When, after the making of the golden calf, Moses pitched the tent outside the camp, "it came to pass when Moses entered into the tent, the pillar of cloud descended, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and (Jehovah) talked with Moses" (Exodus 33:9). God sanctioned in a remarkable way the act of His servant; all the people had to recognise that Moses was approved by Him. It was not that Moses followed the cloud, but the cloud followed him! In a day of general departure the cloud is with those who are faithful, and who maintain what is due to the Lord.

But in Numbers 9:15 the cloud is seen covering the tabernacle of the tent of testimony. The testimony had now taken definite and complete form; that is, of course, in a typical way. There was something set up in this world which was of God in every detail. It was then material and typical, but it has now been set up in a real and spiritual way. The whole mind of God as to what He would have to be set forth in testimony has now taken form. Whatever is of God, as set forth in Christ or which is the product of His work in His saints, can now be viewed as a complete whole. That is the thought suggested in the tabernacle of testimony.

Exodus is largely occupied in bringing before us the constructive side — how God's mind can be worked out by the Spirit through the affections and wisdom of His people so that it takes a concrete form. The material is there seen as furnished by the people, and their wise-hearted labour gives it form according to the pattern seen in the mount. This speaks of things being worked out, so that they do not remain abstract truth merely, but take concrete form. This is

a very important side of things; the truth is not to be left abstract; it is to take shape in a practical way.

But it is to be noticed that the tabernacle is only called "the tabernacle of the testimony" once in Exodus, and that is when the constructive work is finished (chapter 28:21). It is evident that the testimony must be, in itself, a complete whole, and must comprise all that in which the mind of God is set forth. In Numbers it is eight times called the tabernacle or tent of the testimony, and the Levites are appointed over it, and encamp round it, and keep its charge, and Aaron and his sons serve before it as priests. So that in this book the saints are not looked at as the tabernacle, but as set in relation to it in a military or levitical or priestly way. The testimony of God is contemplated as something complete in itself, now committed into the hands of men so that God may be served in relation to it, and that it may be carried through the wilderness without damage or deterioration. The people of God are all set, according to this book, in relation to "the tent of testimony". It is our bond holding us in unity, our chief interest and holy charge; and it is in relation to it that we serve God. Now "the cloud" covers *that*; it is the one thing which God sanctions as being altogether of Himself, and constituting His testimony. It ought to be a great concern to us that there is such a thing today as "the tabernacle of the tent of testimony", and "the cloud" covers it. "The cloud" does not cover what is of man; it rests on what the Lord has pitched and not man.

Then we learn another thing of great importance. "When the cloud rose from the tent, then the children of Israel journeyed; and at the place where the cloud stood still, there the children of Israel encamped" (verse 17). That which is of God, and which He sanctions by His presence, is not a stationary thing. It was designed to be carried from one pitching place to another by levitical service, and the time which it remained in each place was determined by the time the cloud remained on it. This has nothing to do with providential guidance in regard to the circumstances of our individual pathway. All the exercises connected with the movements of the tabernacle of testimony are collective exercises. This kind of guidance has to do with collective movements on the part of the people of God. If the cloud moves we have all to move together. It is, of course, important that we should not move in self-will in our individual path, but that we should be dependent on God for every detail in it. He will certainly not fail those who confide in Him as to that. But the movements here are the movements of the tent of testimony, and everyone in the Israel of God has to move with them, or be left behind.

We have to accept it as part of God's revealed truth that there is such a thing as the divine testimony in this world, and that God orders His people in relation to it. His interest is there, "the cloud" is there; not on tabernacles that men have pitched — there are many of them — but on the tabernacle which the Lord has pitched. There *is* something which is of God, and "the cloud" is on that. Those who move with it know the blessedness of moving with God, and having His presence with them. If we do not move with the cloud we shall lose the light and power of God's presence. I do not say that we shall cease to be the subjects of His love and faithful care, but we shall not be moving *with Him*.

The truth of "the tabernacle of testimony", like many other parts of the truth, has been obscured for many centuries. It may be doubted whether the saints generally even in the early days of the church's history entered into the wondrous wealth and spiritual import of the types. They may have been, like many other parts of Scripture, amongst the divine treasures held in reserve for the last days, that the mind of God might be apprehended in its entirety by saints of the assembly before this marvellous period ends. At any rate, it is certain that the truth of the tabernacle system has shone out again in recent times for the illumination of faith in a way that has not been known since the days of the apostles. Many thousands of saints have apprehended that there is such a thing as the tabernacle of testimony, and have realised that "the cloud" covers it.

But then there is another thing. This chapter speaks very definitely of collective movements under divine guidance in relation to the tent of testimony. The cloud remains so long in one place, and then it moves on. This is a feature of great interest and importance in connection with the testimony. It will be found in different positions, and will move according to divine sovereignty from one position to another. God thus intimates that He will, from time to time, give a new exercise to His people; they will have to move on to apprehend things from a different spiritual standpoint, Not that the testimony itself changes, but it has to be viewed in a new setting.

Do you look at the testimony from the same standpoint now as you did ten years ago? If you do, it raises the question whether you have been moving with "the cloud". People who live on the ministry of the past, and neglect that of the present, are not watching the cloud. It is good to recognise all that has been of God in the past; indeed we see its true value more clearly as we move on with what He is giving and supporting today. The ministry of the present does not discredit the ministry of the past; it develops and enlarges it, and brings out more clearly the mind of the Spirit in it. The spiritual man alone

discerns the movement of. "the cloud". The sons of Aaron the priests blow with the trumpets; they are the first to see the cloud move, and they give the trumpet call to all Israel. The spiritual ministry of the moment, at any time, indicates where the cloud is. That ministry is not merely the exercise of gift in a levitical way; it is the present voice of the Spirit. "He that has an ear, Let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies".

Get alongside anyone who is moving with the cloud, and he would be able to say, Everything is opening up to me in a new and blessed way. I am kept in exercise all the time, but I am realising more and more what a wondrous thing Christianity is. And you might ask, Are you alone in this experience? And he could say, Oh, no; there are thousands of others who share it, who are learning the necessity of moving on, at the cost of much exercise, with the testimony. They are all seeing things in the same new way, and wondering at the blessed movements of the cloud. That is why we get together as often as we can to break bread, to pray, to read the Scriptures, and to converse of the things we are delighting in.

If people do not move with the cloud they soon begin to look with distrust and suspicion at those who do. And sometimes they make themselves quite miserable over what is making others divinely happy. We may depend upon it that the cloud *will* move whether we do or not. The trumpets will sound, and joy and prosperity in relation to the testimony will depend on hearing them and moving forward.

When the cloud dwelt the children of Israel "kept the charge of Jehovah, and journeyed not" (verse 19). It is important to keep the charge. We must not hurry away from a divine exercise too quickly, or we shall fail to get the good of it confirmed in our souls. If the cloud is "long upon the tabernacle" there is need for time to gain the spiritual benefit of the new outlook. If a "few days", the exercise can be matured more quickly. Sometimes it is only "from the evening until the morning", or "a day and a night", or "two days", or "a month", or "many days". There is nothing stereotyped or mechanical about it; we are kept in daily dependence, and in readiness to move as soon as the cloud rises. "The cloud" directs the movements of a living people. The movements of the testimony are a test to the affections and spiritual energies of the saints, but they are a source of continual freshness and gain to those who move with them.

NUMBERS 10

Numbers 10

"And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of beaten work shalt thou make them; and they shall serve for the calling together of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps" (verse 1). These are the last things mentioned as being divinely ordered to be made in connection with the tabernacle. They are called "the holy instruments", or "instruments of the sanctuary", in chapter 31:6. They formed a very distinctive part of priestly equipment; God had in mind to direct the movements of His people in this way continually;

"they shall be to you for an everlasting statute throughout your generations" (verse 8). "Silver", being connected with ransom and atonement (Exodus 30), symbolises divine grace and faithfulness. Every sound of the priestly trumpets carries the impression of this. Whether it is to gather the congregation, or the princes, or to set the camps in movement, in time of war, or in the day of gladness, the trumpets always sound forth in a priestly way the note of divine faithfulness.

"The calling together of the assembly" is the first purpose which the trumpets serve, and this is not to be "an alarm". It is the normal summons of the assembly. It was a wonderful sound that went forth to the whole assembly when the Lord said in the upper room at Jerusalem: "This do in remembrance of me". How it was designed to gather the whole assembly! We know how that call has been disregarded, and the precious supper of our Lord has even been perverted until it has become in Christendom positively idolatrous, and a chief means of maintaining the pretensions of a false priesthood. But what a true sound went forth from the silver trumpets about a hundred years ago, when it was brought home to many saints that the Lord could be counted on if His people came together to eat His supper without sanction from men, and apart from the official order which had come to be regarded as indispensable! The trumpets sounded, and have been sounding ever since, "for the calling together of the assembly". It is not something new; it is the original divine order, restored in the grace and faithfulness of our God.

Then it is said, "the whole assembly shall gather to thee at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (verse 3). Moses represents the authority of the Lord, and this is to be owned in every gathering together of the saints. "The whole assembly" gathers *to Moses* in verse 3, and "the princes" gather to him in verse 4. This would imply an entire absence of lawlessness or insubordination; everyone says, Lord, to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. There is no gathering

together according to God on any other footing. God would deliver us by the teaching of this chapter from the idea of a formal round of meetings going on mechanically. Priestly exercise is to precede each occasion of gathering together, so that a spiritual sense of having to do with God as of His assembly gives character to the occasion.

The normal assembly gathering together is to eat the Lord's supper, but looking at this in relation to the testimony it has in view our being qualified for a mission here as sent into the world. This makes prayer a great necessity, as the Lord pointed out to His disciples (John 14:13,14; John 15:7,16; John 16:23,24; John 16:26); we can only carry out our mission in dependence. So that the "breaking of bread and prayers" go together (Acts 2:42). There is also the thought in Scripture of the whole assembly coming together in one place for edification (1 Corinthians 14). And in these last days the Lord has put special honour on the coming together to read the Scriptures. All such gatherings are the result of priestly exercise and the sounding of the silver trumpets. It is in divine faithfulness that they have been restored in a day of departure. Verse 4 gives scriptural ground for a care meeting, or a conference of brothers having a special care for God's interests (see Acts 15:6; Acts 20:17; Numbers 1:16; Nehemiah 8:13). All this has part in the divine order which we have to learn.

Then when the camps are to "set forward" the priests have to blow "an alarm". This means a re-adjustment of position and outlook. We have looked at things from a certain standpoint for some time:

now we have to move on and look at them from another standpoint. This involves definite movement of a collective nature. The people of God are to acquire new spiritual experience and a new outlook. The testimony remains exactly what it ever was, but we are now to see all connected with it in a different way. For instance, justification by faith was a great feature of the testimony in Luther's time, and it is as much so today as it was then. But how differently do we see it now! How much more fully and clearly! And this applies to the righteousness of God, reconciliation, eternal life, the truth of the assembly, the truth of the Lord's sonship, and many other things. They are just what they always were, but the movements of the testimony have brought us into a clearer view of them, which neither we nor our fore-fathers had before.

The cloud being taken up is a movement on God's part which is spiritually discerned by the priests, who then blow the trumpets. As I understand it, this is not exactly levitical ministry, but a priestly summons which has divine authority. We read of "what the Spirit says to the assemblies". No doubt He

speaks through human vessels, but what He says has to be discerned by the spiritual ear as *His* speaking.

"And when ye blow an alarm, the camps that lie eastward shall set forward. And when ye blow an alarm the second time, the camps that lie southward shall set forward" (verse 5). The orientation of the tabernacle, and of the camps, is a matter to be carefully noted; that is, the eastward position. We all know that it is imitated in a gross and material way in the building of churches and cathedrals, but we need to understand its spiritual import. It is "toward the sun-rising" (Numbers 3:38), clearly intimating that the testimony, and the movements of the camps in relation to it, have in view the coming of the Lord.

Every feature of the testimony will be brought in publicly when the Lord comes, and His coming is the goal towards which all spiritual movements tend. Everything in the testimony is really, like the Lord's supper, "until he come". Moses, and Aaron and his sons, encamp "before the tabernacle eastward". The priestly company is on that side of the testimony, representing those who with spiritual intelligence and affection can serve in relation to it as understanding that it ever has "the sun-rising" in view.

Every movement of the testimony is in that direction. God has *one* thing before Him in relation to the world; He is going to bring the Firstborn into it (Hebrews 1:6), and His testimony ever moves towards that. It must be so if it is God's testimony. So when an alarm is blown "the camps that lie eastward shall set forward". The first movement is with those who are nearest to the sunrising, representing those who love His appearing, and look in the most distinct way for His coming. Such will be alert, and ready to "set forward" at the first blast of the trumpets.

Then when an alarm is blown the second time "the camps that lie southward shall set forward". They represent those who occupy a favoured position in relation to the testimony. There are many such today. Persons who are privileged to see how God has favoured His people in placing His testimony amongst them, and who appreciate this favour. They have not the sun-rising so distinctly in view as "the camps that lie eastward", but they have enjoyment of God's present favour and blessing, and do not desire to lose it by dropping behind, so that *they* move when the trumpet is blown "the second tune". Though not taking up the new exercise so quickly as their brethren who are "eastward", they are ready to move at the second summons.

The camps westward and northward are not mentioned. They seem to represent those who stand in a less favourable attitude in relation to the testimony than their brethren in "the camp of Judah" or "the camp of Reuben". "The camp of Dan" was the last to move, and it typifies those who are most

tardy in spiritual movement, but who do, nevertheless, follow up eventually. The blowing of the silver trumpets precedes the movement of the tabernacle and the sanctuary, but when once *they* have moved there is no further need for the trumpets. The other camps have now to recognise that the testimony *has moved*, and that they must follow it, or be left behind.

Then in verses 9,10 the silver trumpets are blown for an altogether different purpose. It is now that God's people in conflict may be remembered before Him, and be saved from their enemies; or, on the other hand, that in the day of their gladness their burnt-offerings and peace-offerings may be to them for a memorial before their God. So that the trumpets are to be blown Godward as well as manward. His grace and faithfulness are to be loudly sounded before Him in a priestly way both in time of war and in the day of gladness. Such a sound will ever secure His remembrance.

There are times of conflict with the enemy, even "in your land"; it speaks of an invasion of divine territory, an inroad of the foe. At such times "ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets". In times of conflict our being remembered and saved is not by reason of our valiant fighting; it depends on the priestly alarm which regards the matter in its true character before God, and calls in His power. There will be no true spiritual conflict apart from the conviction that there is something at stake which is of God, and which He can and will defend. Spiritual persons discern in it an effort of the enemy, and realise that it is an oppression which has to be met by the power of God. Power comes in when opposition to what is of God is regarded as a work of the enemy. Nothing more falsifies the conflicts of the testimony than to regard them as mere disputes and differences between men who cannot agree. Satan would like the people of God to so regard them. But to "blow an alarm" before God signifies that His attention is called to it as something directly hostile to His interests, and to the peace and prosperity of His people; something is at stake which is of value to Him. God hears the silver trumpets; He has given them to His priests that He might hear them on such occasions. He will remember and save His people.

Then "in the day of your gladness, and in your set feasts, and in your new moons, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your sacrifices of peace-offering; and they shall be to you for a memorial before your God" (verse 10). This is an additional feature to what we get in Leviticus; it sets forth the jubilant character of spiritual festivity. The service of God is no matter of cold and formal correctness; it is like the music and dancing of Luke 15: The joy of conscious acceptance is secured by the burnt offerings, and the joy of communion with God and with His people is

connected with the peace offerings. But the silver trumpets are to sound a triumphal note in connection with both. There is such a thing as spiritual boasting (see Romans 5:2,11; 1 Corinthians 1:31; Galatians 6:14; Philippians 3:3). God loves to hear the memorial of the gladness of His people; He would have it sounded before Him in a prolonged and lofty strain.

It would appear that the cloud rested on the tabernacle for forty-nine days before it was taken up. There was thus a complete period of holy service in restfulness before the movements of the testimony began. God would have us to know the blessedness of His dwelling amongst us in conditions suitable to Himself, and the privilege of approaching Him, before He calls upon us to take up the exercise of spiritual movement in the wilderness.

The movement of the camps here is according to the order of chapter 2, save that we find now that "the tabernacle" was taken down and borne after the camp of Judah so as to be in readiness to receive "the sanctuary" when it followed after the camp of Reuben. It is an additional touch to bring out the care with which provision was to be made for all to be in readiness for "the sanctuary". That is, the direct service of God is the important thing, and the outward order of things should always be looked at in relation to that. What is outward is important, chiefly because it is preparatory to the holy service of the sanctuary. There is a preliminary movement of "the tabernacle", indicating preparation by levitical service for the housing of all that is to be served in a priestly way. I think we may say that in 1 Corinthians we see Paul serving in a levitical way to set up "the tabernacle". He is putting all that is outward in order, as having in view that the holy service of the sanctuary should have its place amongst them. The service of God will always take character from the present position of the testimony, so that a certain re-adjustment is necessitated by every wilderness movement.

In what Moses said first to Hobab there was a fine sense of Israel's calling, and of the blessedness of Israel's movements. There was a place of which Jehovah had said, "I will give it unto you ... Jehovah has spoken good concerning Israel" (verse 29).

Moses addressed Hobab as one conscious of God's great thoughts in regard to His people. He spoke of the place and the people and the journeying on the high level of divine thoughts, according to the elevation of what was in the mind of God.

He was also finely evangelical. "Come with us, and we will do thee good". He was not narrowed up; the "good" of which Jehovah had spoken was there for

a Midianite, if the wonderful things spoken, or the appeal of Moses in regard to them, had any attraction for his heart. But Hobab minded earthly things; he was not at all disposed to cast in his lot with the people of God. "I will not go; but to mine own land, and to my kindred will I go".

It is interesting to see that one of Hobab's kindred — perhaps one of his descendants — became an overcomer in regard to the influences which prevailed to divert Hobab from the blessing which was put within his reach. "Now Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites, from the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far as the oak of Zaannaim, which is by Kedesh" (Judges 4:11). He left his own land and his people, and obtained honour in Israel, peculiar distinction being acquired by his wife through her destroying one of the great enemies of God's people.

As the propounder of the good which Jehovah had spoken concerning Israel, and in calling Hobab to come with them and they would do him good, Moses was honouring God in a most blessed way. Hobab would receive all possible good by coming with them! But Hobab had no heart for the good that is of God; he had his own interests and his own people; they were more to him than the blessing of God.

But how exercising it is to see how soon the most distinguished servant of God can drop down from the elevation of divine thoughts to the level of nature! We might think it strange, if we did not know our own hearts, to find that Moses could drop so soon from the high level of what he had preached so beautifully to Hobab. He had preached that all the good was on Jehovah's part and with His people, and Hobab might participate in it if he would come! But then, thinking for a moment of the wilderness and its perils and perplexities (like Peter seeing the wind strong, and beginning to sink), he begins to feel that he needs Hobab, and that Hobab could do *them* good! "Leave me not, I pray thee, because thou knowest where we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou wilt be to us for eyes" (verse 31). How could such a man as Hobab know where they were to encamp? Was he in the secret of God's ways? What about the cloud and the silver trumpets? How soon we can turn from the Fountain of living waters to broken cisterns! How soon trust a broken reed rather than the living God! What a warning to us!

The Midianites were a deadly influence later on in this book. They were children of Abraham by Keturah, and seem to typify the ensnaring influence of natural relationships. Even a Barnabas was entangled in this snare, at any rate for a time. It is humbling to think that Moses, of all people, a man honoured of God perhaps above all others, should be the first one to want a human prop to

lean upon! It was a serious matter in God's account, but He met it in a wondrous way of grace.

"The ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them" (verse 33). There was no thought of this in the original ordering. The ark would have been carried normally in the midst of the camps along with the other parts of the sanctuary. It would have preceded the camp of Ephraim according to Psalm 80:2.

But this sorrowful moment of failure on the part of Moses changed the order. The people were not, indeed, up to the high dignity of being the custodians and guardians of the ark. It had been, as it were, proposed that it should be their sacred trust. But the failure of Moses had brought to light that on their side, even as seen in the best sample, they were not fit to be trusted with such a charge. The ark in going before them was really taking its right place — the only fitting place. It would lead the people, and search out a resting place for *them*. It would be their Guardian and Guide, the Witness to them of divine faithfulness and care. God would take, in the ark of His covenant, the only place which it was suitable for Him to take with such a people. He would manifest His tender care and consideration in a marvellous way.

"The ark of the covenant of Jehovah" appears now under this title for the First time. God gives prominence to Christ as the One in whom He has engaged Himself to His people in everlasting faithfulness. The ark went before them "to search out a resting place for them". There is something very touching in this. Christ, as the Witness and Pledge of divine love and faithfulness, goes before His flock as their Leader and Shepherd, charging Himself with care that they shall have a resting place even in the wilderness! And this is additional to "the cloud".

"The cloud" expresses to us that God is with His people in a way of which definite account can be taken. It is even to be discerned by a simple person, or even an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 14:24,25). The movements of "the cloud" are to be discerned and followed by God's priests and people. But "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah" speaks of Christ in the blessed service of His love, leading in every wilderness movement, and ever having in mind "a resting place". It is by His own leading that His saints are brought together in assembly, to rest there in the love of which His supper speaks, to know the covenant love of God, and the place which we have before Him as sons.

Moses accepted the divine rebuke, for it was a rebuke, though without a word being spoken. God knows how to rebuke His servants without letting anybody else be aware of it, as the Lord did in the case of John the Baptist. How often God answers our weakness and failure in a way that gives us, through infinite

grace, new apprehensions of Christ and of Himself! We learn to value in a peculiar way divine faithfulness. Verses 35,36 show how quickly Moses escaped from the influence which for a moment cast a shadow over his confidence. How suitably he could speak to Jehovah, both as to the movements of the ark and its resting!

“Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered;
And let them that hate thee flee before thy face”. Numbers 10:35

He sees the ark as moving forward through a hostile region in an irresistible power that can scatter every foe. Such is the power that leads in all the movements of the testimony. Every force of evil will oppose those movements, but when Jehovah rises up they are all scattered. Whatever conflicts there may be, God will not suffer the movements of His testimony to be checked.

“And when it rested, he said,
Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel!” Numbers 10:36

The movements and the conflicts have always “a resting place” in view, not only for God’s people, but for Himself. He loves to rest in the midst of the holy myriads who love Him. The wilderness experience is not *all* movement, not all exercise and conflict! There are resting places in which the saints can enjoy the blessing with which God has blessed them, and where God Himself can rest in the blessing which He has put upon His people.

Here the first part of this book ends. It has given us in wonderful detail the divine ordering of God’s people as set in relation to His service and testimony in the wilderness. The closing verses of this chapter are a grand climax in which we see the stately progress of the testimony according to its proper order and glory, as identified with “the cloud”, and with “the ark of the covenant of Jehovah”. It is as though God would give us a magnificent idea of what was in His mind in regard to His Israel, before He sets forth in the following chapters the actual and sorrowful conditions which soon manifested themselves.

NUMBERS 11

Numbers 11

It is very sobering to us all that evidence of an evil heart of unbelief should so soon appear in people who had been the subjects of so much divine favour.

"And it came to pass that when the people murmured, it was evil in the ears of Jehovah" (verse 1). They "became like men complaining of evil", as the margin reads. They were not at all pleased with God's ordering, or His leading, or with His provisions for them.

We must not read this merely as history. "These things happened as types of us Now all these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10:6,11). Indeed many of the things written in this and the following chapters are undoubtedly prophetic of what has taken place in the Christian profession.

The divine order, as presented in the preceding chapters, was perfect, but it called for continued subjection, and exercise in dependence, and this is never acceptable to the flesh. It is evident that very early in the history of the church there arose a spirit of discontent with the true order of God's house, and in Christendom generally a human order still prevails which relieves men of exercise, but robs them of spiritual privilege and joy. All sorts of excuses are made for disregarding divine order, but to do so is really to murmur against it. This is a very serious offence against God, however lightly men may think of it. We find here that "Jehovah heard it, and his anger was kindled, and the fire of Jehovah burned among them, and consumed some in the extremity of the camp" (verse 1). The mind of the flesh is a subject of judgment, and here particularly in its discontent with divine orderings. We may see an example of this in the fact that many at Corinth were weak and infirm, and a good many had fallen asleep, because of the disregard of divine order in the assembly. The flesh in the people of God is no better than it is in the ungodly, and if we allow it to become active God has to bring home to us that He does not overlook evil in His people. His object is to purify us even "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning" (Isaiah 4:4). Many of the people of God have found themselves at some time or other at that place on the spiritual map which is called "Taberah", which means, Burning.

When the people cried to Moses, and Moses prayed to Jehovah, the fire abated. Again and again in this book Moses is seen as interceding for those who deserved judgment. He was the one who could estimate the seriousness of the offence more truly than anyone else,

but as the mediator of the covenant he knew what was in God's heart, and could pray for the offenders as counting upon grace in the blessed God. In this he is a precious type of our Lord Jesus Christ. God intends His governmental dealings to be felt, and when they are felt there is a cry. It may not always express a very deep or intelligent sensibility, but there is enough feeling to express itself by a cry of distress. This affords opportunity for the intercession of Christ; He prays for the people of God who have come under God's displeasure in a governmental way, but who have now been brought to feel its effects so that they cry. He prays as having the precious thoughts of God in His heart; His intercession, in this aspect of it, is occasioned by the failure, but it rises above the failure into all that of which He has been the Mediator. *That* cannot be invalidated, whatever may have come in on the people's side.

God's people have for long centuries murmured against His order by showing their preference for a human order which He never instituted, and God has always regarded this with displeasure. No doubt many in the course of the church's history have been caused to feel that things were wrong, and that they were suffering under God's government, and they have cried. The Lord Jesus has prayed for all such, and I believe that in answer to His intercession there has been a great abatement of God's governmental dealings. It does not say here that the fire went out, but that it *abated*. There has been a state of things which God can only regard as evil, but at the same time the intercession of Christ has secured some amelioration of the severe dealings which have been merited. He has caused His fire to abate, and has brought in again and again the evidence of His compassion, and of His thoughts of faithful love. It has been so all through the history of the church. There has been much that was evil and called for judgment, and the fire has burned. But we cannot doubt that there has been a cry from many hearts made sensible of divine displeasure, and there has also been the intercession of Christ. By reason of these two things God has accorded a measure of relief from what would otherwise have been very severe burning, and has extended mercy in remarkable ways. We have only to think of God's movements in grace all through, notwithstanding the general departure from His order, to see how He has abated His judgments, and abounded in mercy and goodness. Much that has happened in Christendom has been the burning of God's fire, but at the same time He has done much on the line of forbearance and sovereign goodness, and all that has been an abating of the fire. I believe everything on this line has been based on some cry from His people, and also on the continued intercession of Christ.

The secret of a good deal comes out in verse 4. "And the mixed multitude that was among them lusted". "The mixed multitude" has been the starting point of

much evil in the church. The enemy's object from the beginning was to sow tares amongst the wheat; these are really sons of the evil one — persons whom he can use to further his own deadly work. But without being altogether sons of the evil one many have outwardly identified themselves with the people of God who have had nothing in common with them spiritually. But the people of God have the flesh in them, and this can be acted on and brought into activity by fleshly influences emanating from others. So we read again and again, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump". An active fleshly desire in one may be the means of arousing a latent desire in many others. We see in Corinth and Galatia how quickly an evil influence spreads.

So here the lusting began with "the mixed multitude" — those who were not of the Israel of God at all-but it soon infected even true Israelites. "And the children of Israel also wept again and said, Who will give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for nothing; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; and now our soul is dried up: there is nothing at all but the manna before our eyes" (verses 4, 5). The food of the world is tasty to the natural man, and if we have known it in the time past of our lives we have to watch against influences which tend to revive old tastes. We may be sure that the flesh will hanker after what suits it, so that our only security is to walk in the Spirit. If we drop down from that, we are at once on the level of the flesh, and nothing suits the flesh but Egypt's food. It was ceasing to recognise and walk in the Spirit that opened the door to fleshly ambitions and desires, and brought the church down to the level of the world.

The discontent in verses 4, 6 is more serious, and more fundamental, than the murmuring in verse 1. There it was, apparently, discontent with divine *order*, but here it is aversion to all that, is pleasing to God in *life* for the wilderness. It has all come before Him in the life of Jesus, and His thought for us is that "the life of Jesus" should be manifested in our mortal flesh as a result of our feeding upon Him as Manna. But the flesh has no liking for the features which marked the life of Jesus here. It may pretend to approve or admire them in an abstract way, but it is altogether indisposed to assimilate them so as to find real satisfaction in them, and take character from them. Do we delight to ponder the things which made up the life of Jesus? Obedience, subjection, dependence, meekness, lowliness, the love of righteousness, the hatred of lawlessness, absolute separation from the world as not being of it, delight in the saints, having His portion in God, setting God continually before Him. All coming down from heaven, but manifested in a life of lowly grace here on earth, and now provided for us as food — the true Manna. It is as seen in perfection in Jesus that God gives it to us as food to satisfy and sustain. But

the flesh sees nothing gratifying in it, can gather no satisfaction from it; it does not appeal to the natural tastes of man.

The flesh is not only indisposed to move practically in a life that is pleasing to God, but it has no taste for such a life when presented in Christ as food. It is a deep and searching self-discovery to find that in our flesh there is no real appreciation of what delights God when it is seen in perfection in Christ. There is no relish for it *as food*. A people who feed on Christ will walk even as He walked according to the measure of their feeding upon Him, but if we do not care for Him as food it is impossible that His life should characterise us practically. Despising the manna brings out that the flesh has no inward appreciation of Christ; this is a far deeper lesson than to be made conscious that we have failed practically to walk like Him.

How prophetic is this of what has come to pass in the Christian profession! The manna has been available all through. Indeed, we may notice that though God dealt severely with His rebellious people He never withdrew the daily supply of manna, never even threatened to withdraw it. But the flesh has never had any taste for it, so that *as food* it has been lightly esteemed. Only lovers of Christ can delight in Him as the food of their souls. The features of His lowly life have been known in Christendom, but how little have they been appreciated *as food*! They have been turned into things which men were to try to work out in themselves to be a credit and merit to themselves. Men have often been urged to imitate Christ, but this is a very different thing from feeding upon Him. The one occupies us with ourselves, and either results in self-righteousness or in despair. The other nourishes lovers of Christ upon His perfections, and gives power to walk even as He walked.

The grinding the manna with hand-mills, or beating it in mortars (verse 8), are very different from the baking and cooking of Exodus 16:23. The latter are typical of the legitimate exercises through which the manna becomes available as spiritual food, but the grinding and beating speak of efforts to deal with it in a human way so that it might be made acceptable to persons who did not appreciate it as divinely given. I suppose that almost every feature of the life of Jesus has been subjected to such treatment in Christendom; it has been made into something that could be the material of human effort, something for men to work out so that it might be meritorious to *them*, and that it might appear that flesh could take on the moral beauty of Christ. But this is an impossibility.

The Spirit of God takes occasion by this sad condition of things to tell us what the manna was like. "And the manna was as coriander seed, and its appearance as the appearance of bdellium" (verse 7). Coriander seed has fine

markings, and it speaks of the minute detail with which what was pleasing to God came into expression in the life of Jesus. He lived "by every word of God" (Luke 4:4), and "every word of God" had its perfect answer in Him. "Bdellium" is only mentioned here and in Genesis 2:12. It is probably a precious stone, being spoken of along with the onyx, and it would typify the preciousness of Christ to God; He was "cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious" (1 Peter 2:4). Surely what is precious to God should be precious to every right-minded creature. So that to be non-appreciative of Christ is a terrible proof of a fallen and sinful state.

The taste of the manna is here said to be "as the taste of oil-cakes" or "fresh oil" (verse 8). In Exodus 16. 31 we read that "the taste of it was like cake with honey". There the sweetness of it was emphasised — what it would be normally to a redeemed people taught by grace. But here, in presence of a sorrowful distaste for it, its spiritual character is brought out distinctively. What is of the Spirit will never be appreciated by the flesh; therefore if we seek to give place to what is of the Spirit we must walk in the continuous judgment and refusal of the flesh.

In spite of all that we have read we see divine faithfulness magnified in verse 9. While the murmurers slept, "the dew fell upon the camp by night", and "the manna fell upon it". "If we are unfaithful, *he* abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). In Exodus 16 we are told that "in the morning the dew lay round the camp", but here it is said to fall *by night*. It speaks typically of the faithfulness of God as known in a dark period such as we are in now. Nothing fails on the divine side.

Moses heard the people weep (verse 10), not over their sinful lusts and murmurings, but in their vexation with God. It was a terrible down grade of evil, from murmuring to lusting, and from lusting to the passionate expression in tears of extreme vexation. The anger of Jehovah was greatly provoked, and it was also evil in the eyes of Moses. He was a faithful servant, and his feelings were in harmony with God as to the evil state of the people. For that state was such as to be intolerable.

But God's eye is upon everything, and He can bring many different things to light by the same set of circumstances. The evil state of the people became a crucible in which Moses was tested. A state of general unfaithfulness brings peculiar testings upon those who are faithful; *they* are not exempted from the searchings of God, For the nearer anyone is to God, the greater becomes the demand for purity of motive, and that he should consider only for God. A faithful man is tried by what is evil, but this is not always *purely* on God's account; it is an exceedingly difficult thing for us to get away from how things

affect ourselves. And when *self* comes in God is not fully honoured, even though one's moral judgment may be right.

There is something which lies nearer to the heart of God than the judgment of evil, and that is the expression of Himself in His own thoughts with regard to His people. He had said to Moses, "Carry them in thy bosom, as the nursing father beareth the suckling" (verse 12). This was how God was acting, for Moses could tell them long afterwards, "Jehovah thy God bore thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went" (Deuteronomy 1:31). God had put upon Moses the great honour of representing Him in His tender parental affection. The people were undoubtedly evil, but what was God? Had He not been bearing their burden all the time from Egypt? Had they not been in *His* bosom? (The word "loveth" in Deuteronomy 33:3 means to have in the bosom.)

The question of what the people were was, for the moment, a secondary one. God would deal with that presently, but He would first search out whether *Moses* was really answering to His mind, and to what He had said to him. Was Moses up to what he had been called to be? Was he a true representative of God in parental affection! He had to confess that he was not. He regarded it as evil, and as a burden, that God had bidden him to carry them in his bosom. "I am not able to bear all this people alone, for it is too heavy for me". It is comparatively easy to judge evil when it comes before us in a glaring way, but oh! how difficult — nay, we might say impossible — for flesh and blood to truly represent God as He wills to be represented in this wonderful time when He is made known as the Father!

The place which Moses had, according to what God had said to him, was a beautiful picture of how divine affections would be expressed in a Man, that is, in Christ. God's thought has ever been to express Himself in Man, and thus to draw men to Himself; "I drew them with bands of a man, with cords of love" (Hosea 11:4).

Moses was only great enough for this in virtue of the Spirit being upon him, and the evil of the people brought out his personal weakness, as it so often does in God's servants. "Have I conceived all this people? ... I am not able to bear all this people alone, for it is too heavy for me" (verses 11 - 14). The burden was not too great for God, or for His Spirit, and He would have supported Moses as His representative, but Moses failed to rise to this great and divinely conferred dignity. Indeed, only Christ could be fully representative of God in a faithfulness and care that is absolutely unwearied. How much of ignorance and waywardness God has borne with in His people! But He does not give them up. He had even to say, "my people are bent upon backsliding

from me", and yet He says, "How shall I give thee over, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee up, Israel? ... For I am God and not man" (Hosea 11:7 - 9).

Thank God, there is One who will never say, "I am not able to bear all this people alone". The Lord Jesus will carry His chosen ones through, notwithstanding all the contrariety of the flesh. And His Spirit expressed itself wonderfully in Paul, who Was ready to travail in birth even twice for *his* children, and who could carry "the crowd of cares pressing on me daily, the burden of all the assemblies" (2 Corinthians 11:28), without complaining that it was too heavy for him.

Jehovah met the weakness of His servant by granting him seventy men to bear the burden with him. God always has reserves which He can bring forward. He is never dependent on those whom He is pleased to use, and if they decline the honour which might be theirs, He will relieve them by putting some of it on others. He deals with us according to our faith, "I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them". The power was not increased, but it was distributed, and it took a new form. "When the Spirit rested on them they prophesied, but they did not repeat it" (verse 25). Prophesying is an activity by which God can act morally on His people whatever their state may be. Divine faithfulness takes this form in a day of departure. When the original order which God set up is departed from, whether through human will or human weakness, He reserves to Himself liberty to speak to the consciences and hearts of His people in a prophetic way. He did it all through the history of Israel, and He has been doing it all through the history of the church. He keeps this door open by which He can reach His people.

What He causes to be spoken in the power of His Spirit will always be a word for the time, suited to meet present conditions; hence it is written, "they did not repeat it". The states which God has had to consider and meet at different times have been very varied. I believe He has always met them in His faithfulness by giving something divinely suitable. We have the Lord's judgment of the assemblies in Revelation 2, Revelation 3, but He also tells us that the Spirit will have something to say to the assemblies, and we are to hear what He is saying at any particular time. It is not a mark of wisdom to disregard the prophetic utterances of the past, but our power to hold and value what has been given in the past depends on our having an ear for the divine speaking of today. God will secure, even in a day of general evil, and when there is weakness even in the faithful, that there will be divine speaking, and our exercise should be to have it amongst us. Not merely the repetition of what has been said before (though it might be necessary to remind saints of

that; 2 Peter 1:13,15), but the present speaking "as oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). In such speaking there will be a distinctive speciality on each occasion; it will not be marked by repetition.

In a day of departure and weakness Scripture would lead us to look for God's truth to be brought home to the hearts and consciences of His people so that they may be morally affected, and know His mind. Such things as miracles and speaking with tongues are not to be desired at such a time. The "seventy" would represent "faithful men" selected by divine sovereignty, by whom God can communicate His mind in a day of departure. Their names were "written", which implies selection; it brings in the principle of sovereignty, and we have to acknowledge this in every movement which is of God today.

Eldad and Medad had not gone out to the tent; there was it certain irregularity about them, and neglect of due order, but God did not suffer that to invalidate their selection or their gift; "they prophesied in the camp", without being publicly associated with Moses as the others were. It could hardly have been right, for them not to go out to Moses and the tent, but God moved in His sovereignty and caused His Spirit to rest on them, even though there was this failure. In a day of departure God does not hold Himself bound as to what He will do. If He made it an essential condition that all should be in order before He did anything there would be nothing done at all. Thank God! He is not bound, and never will be; and His movements by the Spirit are often sovereign movements which do not justify the conditions in which He is pleased to move, but which magnify His own sovereignty in mercy.

The irregular ministry of the two brethren aroused Joshua's envy for his lord Moses, but it brought out a beautiful spirit in Moses. "Would that all Jehovah's people were prophets, and that Jehovah would put his Spirit upon them!" (verse 29). The fact that they prophesied was a certain diminution of honour for Moses, the consequence of his unpreparedness to carry the burden alone, but he accepted this in a lovely spirit. We see in Moses, and we might say in Paul also, how quickly a spiritual man accepts correction or adjustment; he has not to be talked to for weeks to get him to see it. These men are wonderful models for us!

The state of the people could not be over-looked by God, and we see here how He dealt with it. "And unto the people shalt thou say, Hallow yourselves for to-morrow, and ye shall eat flesh; for ye have wept in the ears of Jehovah, saying, Who will give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt; and Jehovah will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Not one day shall ye eat, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; but for a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it become loathsome unto you; because

that ye have despised Jehovah who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?" (verses 18 - 20).

One of the most solemn things in having to do with God is that if we are set upon having what the flesh likes we may get it until it becomes loathsome to us. God may even give what is requested in great abundance, and in a remarkable way providentially, so as to show even in such a way that His hand has not become short. We have to weigh very seriously that there is sometimes a judicial element in what God gives. "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). God may be allowing us to prove that we have despised Him, and there is no true satisfaction in the thing we have longed for.

This is very admonitory to us as individuals, but it is also prophetic of what has come to pass in the Christian profession. The "flesh" which the people craved was what would suit the taste of men as men. Not necessarily bad things, as men would judge, but things that minister to natural tastes. It is figurative of all the things that have been introduced to attract people, and to keep them together. They have, to a large extent, got what they want, but oh! what spiritual leanness goes with it!

In Exodus 16 the quails were given in grace as preparatory to the manna — the quails in the evening and the manna in the morning. The felt exigencies of the people brought out the resources of divine grace. God would end the day of murmuring by enabling us to appropriate Christ as having come into death for us, so that we might begin a new day by the appropriation of Him as manna. The people did not exactly ask for flesh in Exodus 16. It was what Jehovah saw would meet the conditions, and typically prepare for the manna, all leading to the sabbath. It was a wonderful instruction in grace. Whatever state of soul there may be there is that in Christ which will divinely meet it. It is one thing to learn the resources of grace at the beginning, and to live on them, but quite another to grow weary of them and despise them. This latter is what we see in Numbers 11. The asking for flesh here is, in principle, apostasy, for it is a turning away from the divine provision — typically, from Christ and all that is spiritual — to what is gratifying to natural tastes.

What God gives in grace meets the existing situation divinely. But what He gives in His governmental ways is sometimes in order that things may work out to their full result, and finally come under His judgment. What we find at the end of the chapter is really the doom of apostasy. Let us beware of the first steps in that direction. If we do not walk in accord with the death of Christ, and as buried with Him, we shall be sure to lust after what is not Christ, and if we get it there will surely be a proving that the end of that is

Kibroth-hattaavah — the graves of lust. If we obey “from the heart the form of teaching” into which we are instructed (Romans 6:17), we shall be preserved from the graves of lust. As buried with Christ we shall walk in newness of life, and appreciate the manna which sustains that life. There could be nothing more serious than to get into a state in which we think little of Christ. It is the state in which Judas was found, and in the Christian profession it is, in principle, apostasy.

NUMBERS 12

Numbers 12

We have seen something of the searchings of God in chapter 11, and this solemn subject is continued in the chapter now before us. None of us escape these searchings, not even the most eminent or spiritual. Moses was searched in chapter 11; now Miriam and Aaron find themselves in the divine crucible. Miriam was distinguished as a prophetess who had sung the refrain to Moses' song when they all celebrated the victorious power of Jehovah for them at the Red Sea. Aaron was the anointed priest of Jehovah. They were very eminent persons, for Jehovah said, "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Micah 6:4).

But each one gets just what will find him out. And when Miriam and Aaron came under divine searching it brought to light an unjudged root of evil. They "spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had taken; for he had taken a Cushite as wife" (verse 1). It has been said by an honoured servant of God that when we think we are judging others God is often really judging our own state. It was so in this case. The circumstance of Moses taking a Cushite wife became a test to Miriam and Aaron, and the test brought to light that notwithstanding all their special privileges and opportunities, they had not given Moses the place that God had given him. They considered they were entitled to put themselves quite on a level with him. "Has Jehovah indeed spoken only to Moses? has he not spoken also to us?" (verse 2).

Both of them had been honoured by God, but it had evidently turned to self-importance. And their self-consideration blinded them to the most obvious fact in the current ways of God. There was overwhelming evidence that God had assigned a place to Moses which was unique. But an unjudged working of evil in the flesh of Miriam and Aaron hindered them from perceiving this, or adjusting themselves in relation to it.

Their not giving Moses the place that was due to him arose from an inward state that had not really come into subjection to God. The same flesh that murmured against divine order, that despised the manna, and lusted for flesh, now came out as wanting a place spiritually, though in insubjection to God. This brings to light what the flesh is, even in such persons as "Miriam the prophetess", and "Aaron the saint of Jehovah". In speaking against Moses they were really in conflict with the sovereign rights of God. It may be thought incredible that true saints should give such place to the flesh, but here it is. There was insubordination where we might have least expected to find it. The incident shows that even eminent and greatly endowed persons in the

congregation of God may need to learn by painful exposure and discipline the lesson of submission to divine sovereignty.

The place which Moses had was clearly typical of the place which Christ has as Son over God's house, and King in Jeshurun. Nothing can be acceptable to God which does not give Him the place that is due. In Miriam and Aaron we see a rising up against it, brought about by workings of personal feeling and envy. As applied to ourselves, this would come out in speaking against those whom God may be using in a special way. The rights of God and of Christ have to be recognised now in what is divinely appointed, and this is where the test comes. Miriam and Aaron did not speak against God; they would have been afraid to do that. They spoke against one who was their brother, and therefore one whom they felt free to regard as somewhat I on a level with themselves. They were not afraid to speak against him, or to claim that they were as much favoured of God as he was.

This particular aspect of fleshly activity comes out, not directly against the Lord, but against His servants. There was the same sin at Corinth; some were "puffed up" (1 Corinthians 4:18,19), and thought of Paul "as walking according to flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:2); they were not afraid to say that his presence in the body was weak, and his speech naught! (2 Corinthians 10:10); they even accused him of making gain of the saints (2 Corinthians 12: 17, 18). But Paul had seen the Lord; he had been in the third heaven; he was Christ's ambassador — His personal representative; his speaking was Christ's speaking; what he wrote was a test of spirituality; it was to be recognised as the Lord's commandment. To disregard the special place which the Lord had given him was to disregard the One who had given him that place. To speak against Moses was really to speak against Jehovah, for Moses was simply filling the place which Jehovah had given him, and acting in it as Jehovah's faithful servant.

The word translated "servant" in Hebrews 3:5 only occurs in the New Testament in that passage; it calls attention to the exceptional dignity and honour which God had put upon Moses. "My servant" Jehovah calls him twice in Numbers 12; he was faithfully doing what Jehovah had appointed. So when Paul says, "Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ", he uses a word which brings out the official character of his service. He was more than a bondman; he was an officially appointed servant with a definite commission.

We see in Scripture that it has pleased God to have men at different times who were in a very distinctive way His servants. Men such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Cyrus, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Peter, Paul, John, Timothy. Men who acted specially for Him, and who had His support. This has been a

feature of the ways of God which is not to be over-looked; it has marked His work and testimony at all times. The principle of it is seen in the Lord's words, "Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom his lord will set over his household, to give the measure of corn in season?" (Luke 12:42). Such have ability to act for God in a definite way with prudence and wise discretion, and His selection of them is justified by their moral characteristics. Meekness and fidelity will always be found with them — precious features of Christ by which fleshly pretensions can be tested.

Now if there is anyone of whom the Lord can speak as being in a special way *His servant*, and who has a distinct commission from heaven, we may be sure that Satan will seek to do what he did in Miriam and Aaron. He will stir up the flesh even in true saints to speak against him, and to assume to have God's mind as much as he has. It is a very direct way of counter-acting whatever the Lord may be doing at the moment, and the more prominent and apparently spiritual the persons are who lend themselves to it, the better does it answer Satan's purpose. This has been even in our own times one of the most effective forms of opposition to the testimony of God. The lesson of Numbers 12 is needed today as much as ever. To speak against one who is in a distinctive way, "My servant", is really to challenge the rights of God and of Christ as Son over God's house; it is much more serious than people think. It is very solemn that it should be written, "And Jehovah heard it".

"But the man Moses was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth" (verse 3). He did not retaliate; he was a remarkable vessel of the Spirit of Christ. Possibly his very meekness had been taken advantage of by those who wished to assert themselves. But he continued to be meek. Such a servant, when spoken against, will leave matters entirely in the hands of God. It was Jehovah's matter, not *his*. God will most assuredly vindicate His own right to have a servant, and to give him a special place, if He is pleased to do so. He cannot allow His own rights to be impugned in His kingdom, or in His house. Miriam and Aaron had to learn that in speaking against Moses they were really in conflict with God. How solemn is such a position!

Jehovah took the matter in hand Himself. He called the three out to the tent of meeting, and addressed Himself directly to Aaron and Miriam. "And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly, and not in riddles; and the form of Jehovah doth he behold. Why then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?" (verses 6 - 8). Jehovah had given Moses an extraordinary and unique place; He would

not have him to be put on a level with "a prophet"; his immediate nearness to Jehovah, and the intimate terms on which Jehovah was with him, were such as to make it very evident that to speak against him was simply an outbreak of the leprous will of the flesh, though clothed with the assumption of spiritual status, and professing to have godly grounds of complaint. The searchings of God brought it to light in its true character. "And behold, Miriam was leprous as snow".

The woman alone being smitten with leprosy indicates that God was exposing *the state*; for the woman in types is a symbol of this. Jehovah was bringing to light the unjudged root which had led to things being said against Moses. It was fully exposed to themselves, so that, brought under divine conviction, Aaron immediately confessed their sin. "Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not this sin upon us, wherein we have been foolish, and have sinned!" (verse 11). The divine searchings, in the case of true saints, while they fully expose the workings of the flesh, always bring to light what is deeper even than the flesh; that is, the work of God in His people. This becomes manifest in their ability to judge themselves, and to look for mercy. Aaron must have appreciated at this moment, as he never did before, the thought of the bullock for a sin-offering which was prescribed in Leviticus 4: "if the priest that is anointed sin according to the trespass of the people". He and Miriam had, indeed, fallen from their high dignity to the level of the people, nay, even to the level of the poor unclean leper, only fit to be outside the camp. But, with Leviticus 4 and Leviticus 14 in his mind, he was encouraged to look to Moses that the sin might not be laid upon them. He looked to Moses, as fully owning now the place that God had given him. He realised how dreadful had been their sin, but he realised also that through the death of Christ as the Sin-offering their sin might be so dealt with that it would not be laid on Miriam or on himself. Oh! that precious death of Christ! What will it not meet? The sins of the vilest of the ungodly may be forgiven through it, and they may have a purged conscience. The believer, convicted of most awful working of flesh in himself, finds in it the divine way of dealing with sinful flesh, so that its full condemnation is borne by Another, and in seeing it judged there learns to abhor it as he never did before. In saying, "Let her not be as one stillborn, half of whose flesh is consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb" (verse 12), Aaron seems to have touched some of the exercise of Psalm 11:5. The very root was reached; the divine searchings had done their work!

"And Moses cried to Jehovah, saying, O God, heal her, I beseech thee" (verse 13). As soon as the true condition is owned it becomes possible, and morally suitable, to look for divine healing. The Spirit of Christ becomes active in intercession, and God hears. But He does not immediately relieve from

discipline those in whom the flesh has worked in this sorrowful way. To do so might leave the work of restoration incomplete, whereas His thought is that it shall reach maturity. Miriam has to be "shamed seven days. She shall be shut outside the camp seven days, and afterwards she shall be received in again" (verse 14). A working of evil may be truly judged, and owned in confession, and yet a moral work may require to be perfected in the soul. The "seven days" come in here. Time is required, not for God to forgive, but for the saint who has given place to the flesh to go through the moral exercises that are essential if one is to "be received in again" as established in the gain and deliverance which divine grace has wrought. The "seven days" deepen the conviction of what has been already admitted before God.

"And Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days; and the people did not journey till Miriam was received in again" (verse 15). The whole assembly was detained to get the gain of this exercise. The working of flesh was exposed and judged in two prominent members of the congregation, but *all* had to learn by it. The same flesh was in every one of them, and seeing it judged in Miriam they had an opportunity to judge it in themselves. It was a solemn "seven days" for all Israel. Had they really got the gain of it, it would have saved them from much that happened later. What comes to light in one or two may be secretly working in many. Hence every case of discipline raises an assembly exercise. Are *we* really clear of what has had to be judged in another! The "old leaven" has to be purged out; not merely the wicked person dealt with, but the leaven purged out so that the whole assembly may be a new lump as unleavened. If the whole assembly does not gain in holiness by a case of discipline the divine end has not been reached.

Our object is chiefly to see how these things "have been written for *our* admonition", but it is also true that in Miriam and Aaron we see a picture of how the privileged Jews resented and rejected the sovereignty of God in Christ that would take poor sinners, and even Gentiles, into blessing, and how in consequence of this the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost, and they are at present shut up in unbelief. Yet they will, through infinite mercy and under the searchings of God, be yet led to see how sinful they have been, and will judge the pride of heart in which they have spoken against Christ, and after severe discipline and deep exercise they will be healed, and "received in again".

NUMBERS 13

Numbers 13

The searchings of God continue in this chapter and the next, and it is from that point of view that the sending of men to search out the land is presented. "And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search out the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel" (verses 2,3). It will be observed that there is no description of the land; no alluring picture of its waterbrooks, springs, and deep waters, and all the variety of its wealth, such as we get in Deuteronomy 8:7 - 10. It is simply "the land ... which I give", intimating that God would test them as to the place which *He* had in their hearts. If they loved Him, what *He* gave would be very attractive to them, as it was to Caleb, of whom He said, "he ... hath followed me fully" (chapter 14:24). In this chapter it was left entirely to them to form their own estimate of the land, and to give their own report.

"And Moses sent them to search out the land of Canaan, and said to them, Go up this way by the south, and go up into the hill-country, and ye shall see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell in it, whether they are strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps or in strongholds; and what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there are trees in it, or not. And take courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first grapes" (verses 18 - 21). We may be sure that Jehovah would never have proposed such a course save as a test. It would have been quite unnecessary to a people who knew and confided in Him, and who believed His word. It was part of His ways to bring to light the true state of the hearts of His people, as it was known to Him. He allows our hearts to be tested, not that He may know what is in them, but that we may know. Jesus said to Philip, "Whence shall we buy loaves that these may eat? But this he said trying him, for *he* knew what he was going to do" (John 6:5,6). We know from Deuteronomy 1 that the suggestion to send spies came from the people, the evidence of their unbelief, but here in Numbers it is seen to be a test ordered by God. The two things often combine; that is, something which originates in unbelief becomes part of the ways of God to search our hearts.

The test is now "the land ... which I give". It is an important and crucial moment in the history of God's people when they are first brought into contact with what God proposes to give them. Perhaps we do not always think when we read the epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians that God may be

testing the whole state of our hearts! This may be also the case when we hear or read any ministry with reference to those things which answer to "the land". Or when we come in contact with persons who have an interest in those things. At such times we are tested by the estimate which we form of what comes before us. The twelve men exposed the state of their hearts by their estimate of what they saw in the land, and by the account which they gave of it. And it is well for us to remember that in forming and expressing an opinion on ministry, or on what may come before us in other saints, we are often simply revealing our own inward state.

"The land" speaks of what God has in His heart for His people, and therefore it becomes a greater test even than conditions in the wilderness. If God brings His people into contact with what His heart would delight to give them it finds out how far God Himself, as known in love, has His place before us. The consequences of failure under this test were much more serious than they were under any previous one, for, with two exceptions, the carcasses of all that generation fell in the wilderness. "They could not enter in on account of unbelief".

But it is very striking that just at this point "Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Jehoshua" (verse 17). Hoshea means "Deliverance", but Jehoshua means "Jehovah is Saviour". Moses by the prophetic Spirit looked beyond all the failure that was about to be manifested in the people, and had One in the vision of his soul who would not fail nor be discouraged, but in whom the greatness of God as Saviour would be seen. It is a blessed hint that the land would be possessed in the power of a salvation which is wholly of God. He was about to expose the unbelief of a generation that erred in heart, and had not known His ways. He was wrath with that generation, and swore in His wrath that none of them should enter into His rest. But He did not abandon what was before His heart; He had in mind to effect His own purpose by One who would carry in with Himself all that was the fruit of God's election. Jehoshua is, typically, Christ as the One by whom, and in whom, a place is secured for us in the land, in the greatness of God's salvation.

The greatest aspect of present salvation which Scripture presents is the Ephesian aspect. "The glad tidings of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13) has in view the possession of the inheritance (see verses 11 - 14), and being saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5 - 8) comprehends being quickened with the Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. All that is the wondrous outcome of the riches of God's mercy, and because of His great love wherewith He loved us. There is no room there for failure; our side is simply "dead in offences". It is too late for testing the

flesh; everything is hopeless on that line; it must be altogether *God as Saviour*. It is a comfort to see that before the twelve men went to search out the land God had distinctly in view that He would bring His people in, not on the ground of anything there might be, or might not be, in the flesh, but by means of Christ, and by His own sovereign love, and His mercy and grace. These are things into which failure cannot intrude, for they are purely of God. And this is suggested to us as the standpoint from which God contemplated the effectuation of the purpose of His love before the testing of the flesh in relation to it took place. Jehoshua speaks of this; and this is a blessed thing to have before us before viewing the terrible breakdown of the flesh in unbelief. We are privileged, through infinite grace, to take account of all the unbelief and failure of the flesh as those who are in the light of what Christ is, and of God as Saviour. This alters the whole outlook of the soul. If God gets His place before us it shows that a new element altogether has come in. God being before us is by a new "inward man" having come into being. The man of sin and unbelief is morally set aside. And the Christian, as such, has put off the old man, and has put on the new.

But then, in the ways of God, He does test and expose the flesh, and the supreme test is by bringing it into contact with that which divine love proposes to give. He causes us to learn that, according to the flesh we do not appreciate that which He has in view for us. This brings about a very deep judgment of our flesh; it is not only that it lusts after evil thing, but it is not attracted in the smallest degree by the precious things which are beyond the reach of death, and which can be known and enjoyed in "the land". The flesh does not want those things *now*. Learning this lesson brings us to spiritual reality. If God allows us to see that we are practically governed by fleshly and natural thoughts and that we really have not Him before us, there is still space for repentance if we do not harden our hearts. His word is discerning our thoughts and intents, not to discourage us, but to lead us to turn to Him in a sense that He is supreme in grace. He will come in for everyone who turns to Him, and give impulse to the soul to go in for all that is spiritually available through His gift of love. He will give us another spirit so that we may become like Caleb.

The twelve men surveyed the whole of the land. It is part of God's way with His people that what He has to give shall be viewed and reported upon. I believe He brings the whole Christian profession under responsibility in this way, for the twelve men represented all Israel. Their going through the land did not give them possession of it, but it gave them a view of it which brought them under responsibility as to their own estimate of it, and as to what they reported about it. One of the most solemn responsibilities which attach to the

Christian profession is that men are allowed, as it were, to view what God proposes to give. We read in Hebrews 6:4,5 of some who are "enlightened, and who have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the works of power of the age to come". All this is not possession, but, like the forty days searching out the land, it is enough to test the heart as to whether what God gives is valued, and whether there is faith to go in for it in spite of all difficulties.

If God brings before us what He is now giving, He intends that our estimate of it shall come to light; we become responsible to give a report, as the twelve men did. Now, *what* are *we* saying with our lips and by our lives? Are we saying that what God gives at the present time is the very best that love can give, and that it is in our hearts, and that we are set to go in for it, having confidence in God that He will bring us into it? Do we really want all the people of God to go in for it? In short, are we Calebs? Or are we "bringing up an evil report upon the land"?

God has set before us all that is most precious in His sight. "The land" is described in Ezekiel 20:6 as being "the ornament of all lands". It is the choicest possible portion for men, for it is that which the love of God proposes to give; it must therefore surpass every other gain, and transcend the highest thoughts of men. The language of faith is, "Thou, O Jehovah my God, has multiplied thy marvellous works, and thy thoughts toward us: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee; would I declare and speak them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40:6). "But how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Psalm 139:17,18). If God proposes in His love to give a "land" to those in whom He delights, faith would never think of enquiring "whether it is good or bad". It must be good, it must be the best, if God gives it.

"The land" is typical of a spiritual inheritance which can be entered upon and enjoyed here and now by those who know what it is to be "risen with Christ". The men had to say, "surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it" (verse 28). The people were tested, not only by a report, but by actual fruits being brought to them; the bunch of grapes, and the pomegranates, and the figs were there to tell their own tale. I have no doubt that God has caused some of the fruit of the land to be brought under the notice of His people generally. If only a few are in the good of it in some small measure it becomes a tangible witness to all. And nothing is more characteristic of "the land" than the wealthy supplies of spiritual nourishment

which are found there. I believe that God has given, even in these last days, tangible evidence of the abundant food supply which is furnished in "the land". It is perhaps hardly realised what a test this is to all those who become aware of it. It cannot be ignored. It will either result in the awakening of desire for that kind of food, and appreciation of the region which produces it, or it will call out, as in the case before us, a definite despising of the pleasant land.

"Milk" is clearly maternal in origin, and, as flowing in the land, it typifies a nourishment furnished from a source altogether above the level of man after the flesh. We learn from Galatians 4 that a mother suggests symbolically a system which gives character to its children; whether it be the legal system "gendering to bondage", or the system of grace and liberty set forth in Jerusalem above "which is our mother".

It is "above" in the sense of the elevation which belongs to the whole economy of grace. "Milk" establishes with grace, and sustains in liberty; it ever nourishes souls with what is purely of God, and established in Christ. "Milk", as flowing in the land, is not merely food for babes, but is suitable for all ages, being mentioned more than once along with "wine". (Song of Songs 5:1; Isaiah 15:1.) It ministers all the elevated thoughts of grace, even up to the height of Ephesians, and thus liberates from what is on the level of man here, whether as legal or carnal, and builds up the saints in a spiritual constitution.

Then "honey" is the sweet product of the co-operation of many; it speaks of what results from the happy mutual relations in which the saints are set together in the Christian circle, each one contributing something to the common wealth. A completely isolated saint might get a little "milk", but he could hardly have "honey". Spiritual prosperity or increase does not come on the line of isolation, so that the idea of the monk or the hermit is all wrong in principle as well as in practice. The truth of the body has a vital bearing on this. "The whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

The grapes and the pomegranates and the figs typify "the fruit of the light" (Ephesians 5:9). They represent what comes out in the saints as the fruit of the effective divine light in which we are set. It is not a barren light, but a light which fructifies and brings out something positive "in all goodness and righteousness and truth". Ephesians 4, Ephesians 5, Ephesians 6 give us a comprehensive idea of this, and show how the light brings forth wonderful fruit.

God sees to it that all in the Christian profession get some impression of what kind of place "the land" is. It is spoken of in the Scriptures, at any rate, and it

is the subject of spiritual ministry, and there is some witness to it also in saints who walk in the truth. And this becomes a test to all in the profession as to whether it is supremely attractive, so that we are prepared to go in wholeheartedly for it, as being of the generation of faith who can count on God to bring us in.

“And they went up by the south, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were there. Now Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt” (verse 23). Hebron means “company”, and it is striking that it should be the first place in the land that the men came to. It suggests the spiritual companionship which God would have His people to enjoy in that “out of the world” condition which is set forth typically in the land over Jordan. And the Spirit of God calls our attention to the fact that “Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt”. It speaks of “God’s wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God had pre-determined before the ages for our glory: which none of the princes of this age knew, (for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;) but according as it is written, Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man’s heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”. (1 Corinthians 2:7 - 10).

Zoan was the place where the wisdom of Egypt was concentrated, but God causes its princes to become foolish (Isaiah 19:11,13); He has done wonders in the field of Zoan (Psalm 78:12,13). He has brought in death on all the wisdom of man; 1 Corinthians 1 shows the wonders He has wrought in the field of Zoan. All that Zoan stands for was brought under judgment in the death of Christ. Zoan means “the place of departure”; how suggestive that is! Whatever man may have in the world — whether wisdom, riches, or honour — he has to leave it all! But those who are called leave it because Christ has become to them “God’s power and God’s wisdom”. They come to things which were pre-determined before the ages for their glory long before there were any thoughts of this world’s wisdom at all. God would have His people to come to Hebron — to enjoy in companionship precious things which were hidden in the depths of God before the ages, but which are now revealed by His Spirit. Those things are beyond the reach of death; they belong to “the land”.

But Hebron cannot be possessed without conflict, for “the children of Anak were there”, and they were “of the giants”. They represent what is great in the estimation of men. “Persuasive speech”, “philosophy and vain deceit”, “the teaching of men”, “the elements of the world” (see Colossians 2), are all “sons of Anak” who would keep us out of Hebron. The danger is that what is great

in the estimation of men may become great in *our* estimation. The searchers said, "There have we seen giants ... and we were in our sight as grasshoppers, and so we were also in their sight" (verse 34). If we see men as giants God is not before us, and we have lost sight of the fact that He is with His people. Then we become daunted in face of the great show which man makes in the religious and intellectual world.

The names of the three sons of Anak are very suggestive. Ahiman means, "Brother of man", setting forth that Satan opposes the truth of the Christian company by a counterfeit of the divine thought. He would bring the people of God down to a level where they would be on common ground with man after the flesh, so that they might be influenced by human philosophy and teaching, "according to the elements of the world". Then Sheshai means "Free", but he represents a form of liberty which is antagonistic to the freedom with which Christ sets free. The principle of liberty for the mind of man, if once admitted, leads eventually to the complete exclusion of the Spirit of God. Along with this, submission to the lordship of Christ, and to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, is bound to disappear. It is fatal to all that properly belongs to Hebron. Talmai is "Bold", and no one can fail to be struck by the assurance of the human mind, and its confidence in itself. Men put out their conclusions on divine things without the least misgiving, and the very boldness of the mind of man often greatly affects even true believers. All the infidelity that now corrupts the Christian profession is the result of giving way before the sons of Anak. These giants have to be completely dispossessed if the companionship of the Christian circle is to be enjoyed. Hebron, as held for God, would answer to such a company as we read of in Colossians, where Christ is everything and in all. The workings of the human mind have no place there.

"And they came as far as the valley of Eshcol, and cut down thence a branch with one bunch of grapes, and they bore it between two upon a pole" (verse 24). This was an incident of outstanding importance. "The land" is characterised by yielding in extraordinary profusion what is typical of joy; its grapes have their spiritual anti-type in the New Testament references to fulness of joy (see John 15:11; John 16:24; 1 John 1:4). "One bunch" sets forth a complete unity, made up of a number of different parts. I have no doubt it was a figure of what was in the mind of God in regard to His people. His thought was that, as in "the land", they should be an expression in unity of the joy into which He had brought them. John speaks of a fellowship characterised by fulness of joy (1 John 1: 3,4); this fellowship has not its place in the wilderness, but in the land. We may be convinced that there is such a thing, as the children of Israel were when they saw the bunch of grapes being carried on a pole. There was a witness before their eyes of what characterised

the land, but we are not told that anybody ate of it; much less did they go to where it grew! The divine thought is that what is characteristic of the land shall come out in a living way in the saints. It is obvious that fulness of joy is not abstract truth; it is something that, if true at all, is realised in persons. What was set forth symbolically in the "one bunch of grapes" was a complete contrast to everything that was coming out in the people. Instead of unity in the joy of what was given of God there was unbelief, discord, and rebellion.

One grieves to think how true this is as a prophetic picture. The witness has been brought to the people of God — in the Scriptures, if nowhere else — of the opening up of a spiritual region marked by fulness of joy. The divine thought is that the children of God should come into the unity of fellowship with the apostles, and have their joy full. This has been brought before us as definitely as the bunch of grapes was shown to the whole assembly of Israel. But the history of the church, and its present condition, is the sorrowful proof that it has not prevailed over the unbelief of the human heart.

The men returned with a true report of the land (verse 28), but they had more to say about the difficulties that would be encountered than of the goodness of the land. This is always the way with unbelief. It may admit that what God proposes is good, but it considers that the difficulties make it impracticable. The fact is that there is no appreciation in the flesh of what God has to give; His word has not been hearkened to; the supposed difficulties are only excuses for unbelief. Read carefully Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4 as to this.

It is obvious that a faith position of "risen with Christ" is spoken of in Scripture, and that it involves seeking the things above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, and having the mind on those things, and not on things on the earth. But the flesh has not the least bit of inclination to go in for such things. The whole system of religious things on earth is much more attractive. The flesh prefers some kind of religious place and system here, some provision for what is natural and social, something that the young people can enjoy! "Dead with Christ", "risen with Christ", "life hid with the Christ in God", the new man where Christ is everything and in all! The flesh has no liking at all for such things, and therefore sees tremendous difficulties in the way of reaching them. We have to learn that *our* flesh is as indisposed toward such things as anybody else's flesh. It is true that there are difficulties and enemies in the way, but faith believes God and counts upon Him.

So at this juncture the voice of faith was lifted up courageously. "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up boldly and possess it, for we are well able to do it" (verse 31). Caleb represents the product of divine working in man, "But the people that know their God shall be strong, and shall

act" (Daniel 11:32). Caleb did not think of himself, or of the people of God, as grasshoppers, for he thought of God as with His people, and delighting in them. He was whole-heartedly set for what God had given because God was before him. "But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit in him, *and hath followed me fully*, him will I bring into the land whereunto he came; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:24). Caleb sets forth what is secured in man by the work of God, something altogether different from what characterises the flesh. He had the land in his heart because GOD had given it, and his heart was full of confidence in God that by His power they were well able to go up and possess it.

But the flesh is marked by unbelief. And though the ten men at first brought a good report of the land, as soon as they saw the indisposition of the people to receive it, they changed their evidence. Their own unbelief infected the people, and then the unbelief of the people re-acted on them, so that, after saying that the land surely flowed with milk and honey, they turned round and said, "The land ... is a land that eateth up its inhabitants", which was very strange if all the people that they had seen in it were men of great stature! But such is the inconsistency and self-contradiction of unbelief. Unbelief is a vigorous weed that grows apace in the human heart, and rapidly spreads from one to another. It develops, too, as we may see in Hebrews 3, from one stage to another, until finally the word goes forth that none of those who refuse to hearken to God's voice shall see the land. So far as we are concerned, that word has not yet gone forth definitively. We know that Psalm 95: 7,8 is the present voice of the Holy Spirit. In the mercy of God there is a prolonged "Today" which has not yet expired. It was present when David wrote the Psalm, "after so long a time" had already elapsed, and it continued still when the epistle to the Hebrews was written. And nearly two thousand years later, in this our time, the Holy Spirit is still saying — note it is in the present tense in Hebrews 3:7 — "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts". The door is held open by infinite mercy to give us still an opportunity to judge our natural unbelief, and to hearken to the word of God which is speaking still of all that His love has to give.

NUMBERS 14

Numbers 14

The result of the testing recorded in these two chapters was exceedingly solemn. It brought to light that the most of the people who had been baptised to Moses were characterised by unbelief, by despising God, and by rebellion against Him. He "was not pleased with the most of them" (1 Corinthians 10:5). He could have no pleasure in an unbelieving and rebellious generation. The people here represent, typically, the whole baptised profession which is nominally Christian, but is really characterised by unbelief, and by preferring the world to what is spiritual and heavenly. "Is it not better for us to return to Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces before the whole congregation of the assembly of the children of Israel" (verses 3 - 5).

When Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before God (chapter 16:22,45; 20:6) it was an attitude of intercession which was always answered in grace. But in this chapter they fell upon their faces before the congregation, showing how they felt effaced by the rebellious unbelief of the people. This set forth, typically and prophetically, how the unbelief of the Christian profession really nullifies, so far as the unbelievers are concerned, all that Christ is as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Christ as the true Moses — the Mediator — has brought to men the declaration of God in grace and love, the disclosure of all His favourableness, so that men may be blessed in the knowledge of God, and may have an inheritance according to His thoughts of love. Then Christ as Priest is "for men"; He holds that office for the benefit of men in relation to God. A priest must be "able to exercise forbearance towards the ignorant and erring"; it belongs to his office to "offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins". Aaron might well have been acceptable to the people, if they had considered his office, and especially in reference to their imperfections and sins. But they murmured against him as well as against Moses. Ought not sinful men to appreciate One of whom it is said prophetically, that He "made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12), and who said in priestly grace upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)? All that Christ is as Mediator and Priest has been available for men in the Christian profession for nearly two thousand years, but unbelief nullifies it all, so far as the unbelievers are concerned. Unbelief as found within the Christian profession, and that is what is typified here, is the result of a wicked and rebellious will. So the warning is, "See, brethren, lest there be in any one of

you *a wicked heart* of unbelief, in turning away from the living God. But encourage yourselves each day, as long as it is called Today, that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12,13). The people are seen in Numbers 14 as rebellious and hardened; they had wickedly departed from the living God, so that all that had been set before them in Moses and Aaron was completely set aside. "And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt". It is a prophetic picture of what has come to pass, in a terribly real way, in Christendom.

But, thank God! that is not the whole story. We have seen in chapter 13:17 how Moses gave Hoshea a new name, Jehoshua-Jehovah is Saviour. A divine salvation was in mind prophetically, even before the dreadful state of unbelief in the people was exposed. God intended then, and He intends now, to bring what was of Himself into evidence, notwithstanding the general state of the people. So Joshua and Caleb come forward to voice the language of faith. They had seen the land with very different eyes from the other ten searchers. "And they spoke to the whole assembly of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it out, is a very, very good land. If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us into this land, and give it us, a land that flows with milk and honey; only rebel not against Jehovah; and fear not the people of the land; for they shall be our food. Their defence is departed from them, and Jehovah is with us: fear them not" (verses 7 - 9). God was, and is, amongst His people as Saviour, and He showed in Joshua and Caleb how completely He could save men from all that they were naturally, so that they became as distinctly characterised by faith as the generation of flesh was by unbelief.

God had then, and He has now, in the midst of general unbelief, a witness to the power and completeness of His salvation. Joshua typifies Christ as God's salvation, while Caleb sets forth the work of God in man so that there is another spirit with him, even the "spirit of faith" (2 Corinthians 4:13). The two together give the complete idea. That is, a divine salvation wrought by Christ and in Christ altogether apart from what man is as in the flesh. Then a divine work in man which leads to his having the spirit of faith in what God is, and what He has effected — an entirely new principle which is wrought of God, and which honours God. So that the land, which tested what the people were, and brought out their unbelief and rebellion, brought out in those who were on the principle of faith a true and deep appreciation. It was, in their estimation, "a very, very good land". This was how they thought of it, though not yet in possession of it, and this is how those who have the spirit of faith regard what God proposes to give. They may be conscious that they are not in possession or enjoyment of "the land", but they know that it is "a very, very

good land", because the God whose love they know is the Giver of it. This is deeply wrought in the heart of every one who has the spirit of faith, and it accounts for the interest which the saints take in the things of God. They have no thought of returning to Egypt, no desire for another captain who will please them better than Christ! They go on steadily year after year with a deepening sense of the value of what God gives. There is a bit of Caleb, if we may so say, in every believer; each one has heard the voice of God, and wants to hear it; each one watches and prays that his heart may not be hardened, and that he, may not fall "after the same example" of those who do not hearken to the word. Such are not marked by rebellious unbelief; it is their constant desire to know God and His ways better.

Then mark the assurance of faith! "If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us into this land, and give it us". Faith encourages itself to remember that we are objects of delight to the heart of God, as the younger son was when he was clothed with the best robe, and had a ring put on his hand, and sandals on his feet. By the Lord Jesus Christ we have access by faith into the favour of God in which we stand, and the Spirit of sonship makes us conscious that God delights in us. Joshua and Caleb were conscious of having a place in Jehovah's delight; they had drunk in His thoughts of His people as secured for them by His salvation. What they were according to the flesh had no place or part in this; it was simply according to His own purpose and grace. Such is the privilege and joy of faith.

There was nothing to fear, for the simple and blessed reason that "Jehovah is with us" (verse 9). The evidence of this had been present with them all the time from Egypt onwards; they were daily surrounded by proofs of it. But faith alone had the assurance and comfort of it, and the courage which it imparts. The very mention of it only exasperated the generation of unbelief. "And the whole assembly said that they should be stoned with stones" (verse 10). Not only was God despised, and murmured against, but the faith that honoured Him called out violent enmity. It was the last provocation that was needed to fill up the testimony of what unbelief really was, and to seal its doom. The testing had made apparent what was there. The unbelief and rebellion of the natural heart was fully exposed, and also the confidence and courage of those who have the spirit of faith. Now what will follow? How will God act under such circumstances, and at such a juncture? What course will He take? These are vital questions, for the conditions which we see here are precisely the conditions which obtain today.

"And the glory of Jehovah appeared in the tent of meeting to all the children of Israel" (verse 10). We may depend upon it that the glory of God will always

appear at times when it is challenged. It is the great comfort of faith that it should do so, and it is a definite exercise of faith to know how it is appearing under the conditions which exist now. This chapter throws light on this important matter.

God had one man at that moment who had said to Him at the entrance of the tent, "Let me, I pray thee, see thy glory" (Exodus 33:18), and whom He had answered by passing by, and proclaiming what He was and how He was acting towards the children of men. Moses understood that the glory which was appearing in the tent of meeting was the glory which had been proclaimed on the mount. And Jehovah was minded to bring out that His servant cherished the glory which He had shown him, and that he understood what was suitable in relation to it. God loves to give His faithful servants an opportunity to speak to Him in a manner which proves that they understand what He has shown them. Jehovah, having shown Moses His glory, was minded to bring out that Moses appreciated it as the only thing which was suitable to Him under the circumstances which existed. And He brought this out by proposing to destroy the people who despised Him, and to make of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they (verses 11,12). The people deserved to be destroyed; of that there could be no question. To make of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they was a proposal which, I suppose, God would never have made to any other. But He knew to whom He was speaking, and He had pleasure in bringing out the spiritual greatness of His servant. It was His glory to have a servant who knew exactly what was suitable at such a time. So that He might be able to say, "I have pardoned *according to thy word*". God loves to have His servants in communion with His mind, and understanding what is suitable to His glory, so that He can answer their prayers, and do according to their word. Moses was brought to the great spiritual elevation of knowing how it was suitable for God to act in the face of such conditions as were present. God is well pleased to have His saints at that elevation today.

In reply to what Jehovah said to him, Moses made not the slightest reference to a great nation being made of himself; his soul was tilled with something vastly more important than that! It was only just at the end of his speaking that he referred to the iniquity of the people; he was absorbed by something infinitely greater than that! Whatever the people might be, God had been pleased to make Himself known in connection with them as a Redeemer and a Saviour, as One favourable to them, who had thoughts of good in His heart for them. God had set a witness to this in Israel that they might know Him thus, and that even Gentiles might be attracted by the way He was known there. The testimony of it had gone forth, for Moses could speak of "the nations that have heard thy fame" (verse 15). All this was great in the heart of Moses. It

was the very glory of Jehovah that He was made known thus in the world, and it was not suitable to that glory that He should slay the people as one man. Under the circumstances of the moment the destruction of the people would not serve His glory, but would bring reproach upon Him. Therefore His power was to be great in another way. Moses understood all this — a wonderful elevation for a man — and was able to express it to Jehovah.

“And now, I beseech thee, let the power of the Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, Jehovah is slow to anger, and abundant in goodness, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy loving-kindness, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (verses 17 - 19). In this prayer Moses was simply holding to the glory of Jehovah as Jehovah had made it known to him when he was in a cleft of the rock. This was after the making of the golden calf, by which the people had forfeited all title to anything but judgment. It was only on the ground that Jehovah was merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, that He could go on with such a people. Now it must be still the same. There had always been iniquity in the people, but God had not destroyed them, He had forgiven them. It must be either destruction or forgiveness, if people are sinful.

At the present time the unbelief of men who are professedly Christian is fully manifested; they are indeed ready to make a captain and return to Egypt. The lawless one who is about to be revealed is the captain of man's choice, and he will very soon lead the mass of people in Christendom away from everything that is of God. But at such a time as this the glory of God is appearing in the tent of meeting. In spite of the general condition of unbelief the tent of meeting is still here. There is a company built together in the Lord “for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22), and the glory of God appears there. It is not appearing in the way of destruction, but in forgiveness. The mass of those who are in the place of Christian profession are unbelieving and rebellious, but God has been going on for long centuries without bringing in destruction upon them; His ways have been on the line of forgiveness. I am not referring to forgiveness of sins as preached in the glad tidings, and which believers have for Christ's Name's sake, but to forgiveness as publicly manifested by God going on in long- suffering with a sinful people. It is the dominant principle in the public ways of God, and will be, so long as the present testimony continues of Him as a Saviour-God who will have all men to be saved. Nothing suits the present period but forgiveness; it is a

manifestation of God's glory which is worthy of Himself. God is great enough *in power* — for notice that Moses says, "Let *the power* of the Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken" — to rise above all the iniquity, and to go on the line of forgiveness with a people whom, if His power and glory were not great enough to forgive, He would have to destroy.

It is not a question here whether men repent or not; most assuredly the mass of them do not repent. But the glory that is in the tent of meeting is a glory of forgiveness. What a flood of light this caste upon the present ways of God! Christendom is as evil and unbelieving as Israel was, but God is not destroying. He is causing His power and glory to appear in another way. Every unbeliever in Christendom should realise that the only reason why he is not destroyed is that God is standing towards him in the attitude of pardon. And it may be added that He would have everyone of His people to be imbued with the same spirit.

But alongside this dominant principle of forgiveness in contrast with destruction the action of another principle continues; namely, that of divine government. "By no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation". Though pardon marks the present ways of God, and not destruction, this does not mean that God does not take account of what is wrong, or that He will fail to visit it in due time. He pardoned at the intercession of Moses, and did not destroy them there and then, as they deserved. But He intensely disapproved of them as an "evil assembly" who had rebelled against Him. When He said, "Forty years was I grieved with the generation", the word "grieved" implies loathing (see marginal note to Psalm 95:10). God deals in His government with all that displeases Him, though there may be a period, more or less prolonged, during which He does not bring destruction on those who deserve it. His attitude towards all is one of pardon, but this is provisional, pending the time when He will publicly settle every moral question, as He surely will, when all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah. Meanwhile His government continues its inexorable course.

"I have pardoned according to thy word. But as surely as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah! for all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, shall in no wise see the land which I did swear unto their fathers: none of them that despised me shall see it" (verses 20 - 23). This is very solemn. God may pardon in the sense that He suspends a sentence which would otherwise be immediately executed, but that does not mean that He has any pleasure in an

unbelieving people, or that they will escape from His governmental dealings. He may bear long, but in due time every unbeliever will die, and will hereafter stand at the great white throne to be judged according to his works.

“But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit in him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he came; and his seed shall possess it” (verse 24). The generation of faith alone will go into what God has purposed in love for His people. Faith alone really wants it, or could have any delight in it. People have an idea of being happy in heaven, but how can it be if they have an extreme distaste for everything that is spiritual and heavenly now?

The people continue to be an “evil assembly”, and their carcasses would fall and be wasted in the wilderness. “After the number of the days in which ye have searched out the land, forty days, each day for a year shall ye bear your iniquities forty years, and ye shall know mine estrangement from you. I Jehovah have spoken; I will surely do it unto all this evil assembly which have gathered together against me! In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and thus they shall die” (verses 34,35). That is what is going on at the present time. The generation of unbelief has been fully exposed — not in the heathen world, where God’s glory and signs have not been seen, nor His voice heard, but — in the place where there has been Christian light, and God’s voice has been heard. He has not destroyed that generation; He has pardoned in the sense that He allows men to go on without cutting them off in judgment. But they are a grief to His heart, and they are wasting in the wilderness; they will all ultimately be consumed there. Not one of the generation of unbelief will come into the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

The ten men were not pardoned who brought up an evil report upon the land. Theirs was a sin unto death, and they died by a plague before Jehovah (verse 37). Their guilt was such that they were by no means cleared; the government of God acted in a direct way to bring their guilt upon them. God’s general dealing with unbelief at present is forbearing and long-suffering; it is on the line of pardon. But there are exceptional cases in which some special mark of divine displeasure is visited upon men who are prominent in spreading evil influences.

“And Moses told all these sayings to all the children of Israel; then the people mourned greatly. And they rose up early in the morning, and went up to the hilltop, saying, Here are we, and we will go up to the place of which Jehovah has spoken; for we have sinned” (verses 39,40). Unbelief can be presumptuous as well as fearful. Afraid to go up with God, but not afraid to go up without Him. First despising a divine favour which was put within their

reach, and then despising a solemn action of divine government which was now irreversible. Moses warned them that they would not prosper, but that they would fall by the sword. "Yet they presumed to go up to the hill-top ... And the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt on that hill, came down and smote them, and cut them to pieces as far as Hormah (utter destruction)" (verses 44,45).

But Joshua and Caleb would come into the land; also "your little ones, of whom ye said they should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land that ye have despised" (verse 31). The "little ones" were a new generation; they represented, typically, a race that has not been corrupted by Egyptian influences, but has grown up under the nurture of God in the wilderness. It will be noticed that, according to the margin, verse 33 reads, "And your children shall be fed in the wilderness forty years". It corresponds with what Paul said at Antioch, "For a time of about forty years he nursed them in the desert" (Acts 13:18). The "children" represent a generation nurtured by God. So that if He was grieved forty years with the generation of unbelief all the time that they were being wasted and consumed, on the other hand His parental care was being expended on a generation that He was feeding and nursing in view of their growing up to be brought into the land. God had, and has, a new-born generation for Himself of entirely different character from the generation of unbelief.

The new generation is not only fed in the wilderness, but it is disciplined there. It has to learn how displeasing to God all the ways of the old generation are. It has to bear the "whoredoms" of those whose carcasses are being wasted in the wilderness (verse 33). So that their senses are being continually "exercised for distinguishing both good and evil". The "children" were learning, typically, the good in being fed and nurtured by God; they were learning the evil in bearing the whoredoms of the generation that was to perish in the wilderness. These exercises go on with all the children of God. Those who are of the new-born race are nurtured by God, but they have to learn what the old generation is, not merely as seeing it in others, but as finding that in their own flesh good does not dwell. We have all to learn to submit ourselves to the discerning and penetrating power of the living and operative word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, and lays all things naked and bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

All this exercise casts us continually upon grace and mercy. But there is a throne of grace to which we may approach with boldness, and we have a great High Priest who is able to sympathise with our infirmities. There is

everything to encourage confidence even in the feeblest believer. The trials and difficulties of the wilderness now become discipline for us which faith accepts as the chastening of love. The Father of spirits chastens us for our profit "in order to the partaking of his holiness". The nurture and the discipline are going on all the time with every one of the children of God in view of our going into the land.

It is no part of the teaching of this chapter that children of God may fall in the wilderness. It is calculated to produce and deepen in us all great diligence that we may not do so. This is exactly the exercise suggested by Hebrews 3 and 4. But in that epistle, though the writer warns against the danger and possibility of unbelief working, he writes as persuaded concerning those to whom he wrote that they had shown love to God's Name. This was a clear proof that they were linked with Joshua — "connected with salvation" — and not part of the hardened and unbelieving generation, Indeed, he says with much certainty,

"But we are not drawers back to perdition" — we do not want to make a captain and return to Egypt — "but of faith to saving the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

So that while Numbers 14 is full of grave admonition as to the consequences of unbelief, it contains much that is most encouraging and stimulating to faith. We might say that its great positive teaching is that *some will come into the land*. Joshua and Caleb, and all the new-born generation will come in. So that the next section of the book (chapter 15:1 - 31) takes account of the children of Israel as being composed of persons who are going to "come into the land of your dwellings, which I give unto you". The generation of unbelief drops out of the mind of the Spirit of God, the end of that generation having been declared in this chapter. In the next section God identifies the people with the new race that will enter in. After fully exposing unbelief and its end, He goes on with what was before His own heart and mind.

NUMBERS 15

Numbers 15

In this chapter we see how God delights to support faith in the wilderness by giving light as to precious things which will be realised in "the land of your dwellings". The word "dwellings" (verse 2) is really "seat"; it speaks of restfulness before God in a divinely given portion, when His end for His people should be reached. What belongs to "the land of your dwellings" is here made known for the comfort of faith in the wilderness, while we are still being disciplined under the mighty hand of God, and surrounded outwardly by conditions of unbelief and murmuring. God has pleasure in directing our thoughts in an anticipative way to the spiritual occupations which are proper to "the land".

It is before Him that we should thus minister to His pleasure, and He would have it to be before us.

This is the first mention in this book in a direct way of what would transpire when the people got into the land. It is the first light of what pertains to the heavenly position, and it is of deep interest to see that that position is marked by an enlarging apprehension of Christ. For He is set forth in all the offerings spoken of in verses 3 - 16, and He is "the bread of the land" (verse 19). As in "the land" God's people would find holy occupation in bringing Christ as a sweet odour to Him. For whether it be the lamb, or the ram, or the bullock, it is Christ who is offered. And it will be noticed that in the first sixteen verses all are offerings of "sweet odour", not sin-offerings. They speak of Christ as taking up the questions raised by the coming in of sin and death in such a way that all His personal perfection and sweet odour has come out to the supreme satisfaction of God, and in such a way as to glorify Him infinitely, and at the same time become the ground of our acceptance. He has also become through death the ground and substance of our communion, for the peace-offering has a place here (verse 8).

The pleasure of God has been completely secured in Christ as the One who came down from heaven to do His will. Even sin and death have served to bring out what He was in His full devotion to God. As in "the land" all this is apprehended in increasing measure. Leviticus 1 begins with the largest apprehension, and comes down to the smallest, because it is there the line of grace in which God descends step by, step in making provision even for the smallest and feeblest. But here it is an ascending scale, contemplating spiritual increase on the part of the people, from the lamb to the ram, and then to the

bullock. It speaks of increasing ability to bring Christ to God for His delight. Such would be the precious character of things in "the land of your dwellings".

Then each burnt-offering or peace-offering is to be accompanied by a proportionate oblation and drink-offering. What we apprehend of Christ, and bring to God as an offering, whether for acceptance or for communion, is always to have along with it the deep appreciation of Christ in the preciousness of His moral perfection as it came out in His spirit and pathway here. As we increase in the apprehension of what He was as offered in death we necessarily increase in the apprehension of the personal and moral perfection of what was offered.

But it will be noticed that the type does not suggest that any individual offerer can compass the whole of Christ's perfection in manhood. "A tenth part of fine flour" goes along with one lamb; "two tenth parts" with a ram; "three tenth parts" with a bullock. The largest offerer does not go beyond "three tenth parts". It seems to suggest what is plainly stated in the New Testament, that "we know in part". This is true in a general way, for while we are still learning we have all to say, even as Paul did, "now I know partially" (1 Corinthians 13:9,12). And this is certainly true in regard to the blessed perfections of Jesus; none of us know more than "in part". And we can only take up His preciousness and moral perfections in approach to God according to our spiritual measure. I suppose that the assembly, being His fulness as a completed company, will be an adequate vessel to set it all forth. But as individual offerers we can only bring to God what we have apprehended spiritually of Christ, and this is according to our measure. But it is encouraging and stimulating to see that the measure contemplated here is an increasing one. It rises from one tenth part to two and then to three. This is how things go normally in "the land". We become increasingly possessed of the perfections of Christ Godward, and have thus spiritual material for offerings. All those perfections attach to One whom God values in the very highest degree — His beloved Son in whom He has found His delight. And as in "the land" the saints, through grace, value those perfections so as to be able to bring them to God in a profound sense of how pleasurable they are to Him. All here is "a sweet odour".

As we learn Christ we increase in the apprehension of what is spiritual. This is conveyed to us typically in the bringing of the "fourth part of a hin of oil" with a lamb; "a third part" with a ram; "half a hin" with a bullock. This suggests that as in the land we approach God with an ever increasing measure of apprehension of what is spiritual as seen in Christ. All His ways as the blessed Man of God's pleasure here were spiritual ways; His words were spiritual

words; His thoughts, feelings and affections all spiritual. Surely we could not get an enlarged apprehension of this without it having its effect in promoting spirituality in us! Indeed, all that should mark us has been set forth in perfection in Him. So we read, "For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Where were those works prepared? They were all delineated in Christ, and stand connected with the fine flour and the oil. The measure in which we appreciate what has been seen in Christ is the measure of our spirituality, and of our capacity for offering to God.

Then the wine of the drink-offering is in each case commensurate with the oil. The drink-offering is a pouring out in joy in the sanctuary, Paul refers to it expressly when he says, "But if also I am poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice in common with you all. In like manner do ye also rejoice, and rejoice with me" (Philippians 2:17,18). If *they* took on the character of the oblation, *he* would rejoice to be poured out in furtherance of it. If such was the joy of the servant it gives a wonderful impression of the joy of Christ in being poured out in the service of God, and in love to the saints. What joy He found in being here for God, and in the expression of an unreserved devotion that kept nothing back! "To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight". He was poured out in the sanctuary, in love to the Father, and in doing the Father's commandment. It is in that connection that He says, "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full" (John 15:11). Suffering is not incompatible with profound joy. The pouring out indicates that all is yielded up, as when Paul says, "For I am already being poured out" (2 Timothy 4:6), but he is nevertheless finishing his course with joy. The Lord's joy being fulfilled in His own, as He desired (John 17:13), puts them on the line of the drink-offering. The devotion which marked Him, and was His joy, was to be continued in them. It becomes strength, for "the joy of the Lord is your strength".

Verses 14 - 16 contain divine provision in grace for "a stranger". This scripture should have been sufficient in itself to give Israel an intimation of God's thought to bring in the Gentile. The "stranger" is put here on perfect equality with Israel; "as ye do, so shall he do ... there shall be one statute for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you ... as ye are, so shall the stranger be, before Jehovah" (verses 14 - 16). It is one of those blessed rays of light in the Old Testament which shine to show that Christ is too great to be limited to Israel. He was to be, as Simeon said, "a light for revelation of the Gentiles" as well as "the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). When Israel really comes into the land, and is identified with the sweet odour of Christ, there will be

room in his heart for the stranger. The house of God and the heart of God are so large that Israel is not great enough to fill them, so the Gentile must come in. Every "stranger" who wants to identify himself with the preciousness of Christ is welcome to do so. We see this in the highest and fullest way in Ephesians 3:6. "That they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings". Such is the greatness of God in grace that He would have all to come in to participate in Christ; and such is the greatness of Christ that there is enough in Him to enrich all Godward, so that all *may* come to God bringing the preciousness of Christ to Him. God will have as many as possible to know Him, to rejoice in Him, and to be identified with Him. What there is in Christ is for all men to see; God is well pleased that all should know how acceptable Christ is to Him. The Gentiles can come in to offer to God; indeed at the present time God is getting most from the Gentile.

All this is given as divine light for the illumination of faith in the wilderness. It is the light of Christ as He is known and appreciated in the land. How Joshua and Caleb must have delighted in this chapter! Its very setting tends to enhance its preciousness, for it comes in between chapters 14 and 16. In chapter 14 we see a generation of unbelief despising the land, and doomed to fall in the wilderness. In chapter 16 we read of the rebellion of Korah, Nathan and Abiram. But this beautiful chapter comes between for the divine support and encouragement of faith in a terribly dark day. Our position today is very similar to that of Caleb. We are surrounded by an unbelieving generation who despise God and His purpose, and there is also high-handed rebellion. But in the midst of it all We have the light of this chapter. And surely it means much more to us than it did to them, for we can interpret it in a light that did not shine for them.

"When ye come into the land whither I bring you, then it shall be, when ye eat of the bread of the land, that ye shall offer a heave offering to Jehovah; the first of your dough shall ye offer, a cake for a heave offering" (verses 18 - 20). I believe this ordinance is not found elsewhere; it is Christ in a new aspect which gives us something additional to the offerings spoken of in the first part of the chapter, though it is, we might say, the result of them. "The bread of the land", as I understand it, is Christ risen as the One in whom the thoughts of God in regard to His people have taken form. This is founded on what He was as the Antitype of the various offerings spoken of in the first section of the chapter. But it conveys to us the thought of things having come to fruition. The harvest has been gathered in, the corn threshed and ground in the mill, and it is now just prepared to be baked into bread.

But at this point God says, I must come first in your thoughts: you must think of what Christ is to Me. We cannot really enjoy the nourishing power of Christ as "the bread of the land" if we do not think first of what He is to God. It is said of this offering, "as the heave offering of the threshing-floor, so shall ye offer this" (verse 20). God would have us to understand how precious it is to Him to have Christ before Him as risen. The wave-sheaf of Leviticus 23 represents Christ as having sprung up out of death in His own inherent power. He has come up out of death because it was not possible that He should be held by its power. Just in proportion as we have entered into what it was to God to give Him up to death we shall understand the delight of God in receiving Him out of death as risen. Think of what it was to Abraham to receive Isaac, as it were, from among the dead, though in his ease it was but "in a figure"! There was everything in Christ which was beautiful and perfect in God's sight, and in love He gave it up to go into death, but He has received it all back in a new way in the risen One. The joy which God had in receiving Him out of death was commensurate with the grief which it was to forsake Him when made sin upon the cross. The Father loved Him because He laid down His life that He might take it again, and become as risen the Firstfruits of a wondrous harvest according to the complete divine triumph over death.

"The bread of the land" is Christ as come up out of death so that He might become food for us, to nourish us upon what is in God's mind for us, relative to His complete victory over death, as now set forth in Him. As in "the land" we live on what is for ever beyond death, but the point in the scripture before us is that before we *eat* we are to *offer*. "Dough" is bread in a preparatory condition; certain processes have been gone through. The corn has been reaped and threshed and ground and kneaded; it is just at the last stage before baking will make it into bread. "Bread" indicates that things have to take definite form so that they can be appropriated as food. There is no food value in what is indefinite. All the processes through which "bread corn" has to pass represent exercises as a result of which what is true in Christ takes definite form with us. Until it does that it is not available as "bread". This has an important bearing on ministry, which is the supply of food for the Lord's household. If it is to be "bread" it must be definite, and not too large in bulk!

But the teaching here is that of "the First of your dough shall ye offer, a cake for a heave offering" (verse 20). What we have acquired of Christ in the aspect referred to is to take definite form *first* as an offering to God. God is to have His "cake" first. His satisfaction in it is to come first in our thoughts, so that He gets from us the first portion of what we have acquired. True spiritual food for the saints, viewed as in the land, only becomes available thus. The practice of offering first is to be observed perpetually; it is to be "throughout

your generations". What spiritual elevation this would impart to the food supply! It is taken up as that in which God Himself has pleasure, and of which He has had His portion first. It is evident from this that no ministry will edify the saints that has not first yielded something for God. The one who sets bread before the household has first been an offerer; he has ministered Godward before he ministers man-ward. If God will have the first "cake" what a wonderful thought it gives of the character and value of "the bread of the land"! And how it would secure the unadulterated purity of what was eaten! Paul could say, "we are a sweet odour of Christ to God For we do not, as the many, make a trade of (or adulterate) the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, before God, we speak in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15,17). The ministry was maintained at the high level of what was acceptable as an offering to God. So he could speak of carrying on his gospel work as "a sacrificial service" (Romans 15:16). He is thinking of God's part first. It is most elevating.

Then in verses 22 - 26 we are called upon to contemplate the solemn possibility that there might be a sin of inadvertence committed by "the whole assembly of the children of Israel". This shows clearly that even saints viewed as in the land, and as having eaten of its bread, are still in conditions where exercises may have to be taken up relative to sin. It is even possible that something may be "hid from the eyes of the assembly", so that there is that done which has to be acknowledged and forgiven, though "committed by inadvertence". It is evident that the epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians, though they regard the saints as in "the land", do not address them as being immune from the possibility of sinning. On the contrary, they contain grave warnings and admonitions, calculated to move us all to walk humbly with God, as conscious of what we may fall into if not kept by divine power. The possibility of a sin of inadvertence being committed by the whole assembly should lead us to recognise the possibility of such a thing, and this would preserve us from assuming to be more than what we are in spiritual reality.

God is pleased to make provision in grace for a sin of inadvertence on the part of "the whole assembly", and to indicate the kind of exercise that will be acceptable to Him if such a thing takes place. It will be observed that there is a marked difference between the provision for the sin of inadvertence in Leviticus 4:13 - 21 and what we have here in Numbers 15:22 - 26. In the former scripture there is no burnt-offering or oblation or drink-offering, but here these precious offerings come first. Usually when a sin-offering and burnt-offering are found together the sin-offering comes first, but this scripture is a marked exception to the general rule. It seems to me that it is

intended to bring out in a striking way the grace in which the assembly stands, viewed as in the land, and with which God will not allow anything to interfere. He has taken us into favour in the Beloved, and nothing can change that. The assembly cannot really be on other ground with God than the burnt-offering and the oblation, whatever may have borne in. The sin of inadvertence provides, as it were, a special occasion for taking it up afresh,

but it is the abiding ground of our place with God, however necessary it may be that a sin-offering should be brought also. The true way to assembly forgiveness is to take up afresh with God the ground on which we are with Him abidingly. This preserves a true sense of grace, and it also deepens the exercise in regard to that which has come in contrary to divine pleasure. Ten one buck of the goats has to be offered for a sin-offering; the sin is not glossed over, or excused; it is regarded as something which needed nothing less than the death of Christ to remove it according to divine holiness from before God. This has to be felt, and it is a solemn and humbling exercise.

In the case of "one soul" sinning through inadvertence (verses 27 - 29) there is no burnt-offering. The general ground of acceptance of the assembly is not called in question in such a case as it might seem to be by the sin of the assembly. The soul must judge itself in the light of Christ as the Sin-offering, and avail itself of what He is in this character for atonement and forgiveness. This suffices to meet all that is required.

There is no offering for the one who does wrong "with a high hand". There is nothing for such a one but to be "cut off", for he reproacheth Jehovah, despises His word, and breaks His commandment. It is possible to act in such insubjection to God that there is no remedy; this would be what the New Testament speaks of as a "sin unto death". I do not think that this is some particular sin that is worse than other sins, but it is something in regard to which there is such a definite action of rebellious will that it has this character. I believe that a sin unto death is an abnormal and extreme case; it would not be commonly found amongst the people of God.

Then in verses 32 - 36 we have a bit of wilderness history introduced between these unfoldings of what would apply to the people as in the land of their dwellings. It comes in to illustrate how the lawlessness of man would outrage the most blessed provision of divine grace. There is perhaps no more wonderful picture of what God has provided for men in the glad tidings of His Son than the sabbath. In the six days of creation God was working; He did everything Himself; and the result was that everything was "very good", so that He rested in the completion and perfectness of His own work. But sin came in, with all its terrible consequences, and therefore we hear no more of

a sabbath until after God had redeemed people to whom He had become their strength, their song, and their salvation (Exodus 15:2). Then it came to light that notwithstanding all that had come in God had in mind that there should be a holy sabbath of rest, not only for Himself as in Genesis 2, but which could be enjoyed by men through redemption. In that sabbath man's part was to rest, not to work. No effort, or movement of any kind, was called for on man's side.

Now that is the true and only way of all blessing. If man is sinful, lost, and dead in offences and sins, all that will secure blessing and rest for him must be done by God. Man's works can have no part in it; they could only mar it. Through Christ, and through His death, God has secured rest for Himself in regard to all that came in by the serpent, but He has secured it with the intent that men should share it. He delights that men should share His rest in Christ.

But this becomes another test,. Will men be thankful to rest? Will they appreciate the grace that has done all, so that they might rest without having to do one single bit of work? We see in the man gathering sticks on the sabbath day another prophetic picture of what has come to pass in Christendom. Lawless man prefers to work just in the particular thing in which God says he is to do nothing. Everyone who is on the principle of works for blessing is a sabbath breaker. All such will come under the curse instead of blessing, even as this man did.

But there was more in this man's act than working when God's commandment was that he should rest. He was "gathering sticks"; he obviously intended to light a fire, which was expressly forbidden. "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings upon the sabbath day" (Exodus 35:3). This commandment was given after the glory had shone in the face of the mediator, which typically set forth what we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18. "But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit". God is effulgent in grace, and in beholding it His people are transformed according to the same image; they become like Him; they reflect the glory of grace. But fire speaks of judgment, and in gathering sticks this man was figuratively making manifest that he was entirely out of accord with the spirit of the covenant.

The present period of grace is a prolonged sabbath into which God will not allow human works to be introduced. He has secured perfect rest for Himself in Christ, and in all that Christ has accomplished, and He is making this known so that men may rest in what has been divinely completed, and which requires no touch of man's hand to add to its perfection. But men break the sabbath by bringing in their works and religious doings; they would rather *work* for

blessing than *rest* in Christ as God's Sabbath. But along with the non-appreciation of grace there is also the activity of a judicial spirit which is ever ready to condemn others, and even to judge the ways of God in grace. The Pharisees were exactly on this line, and it is a wide-spread evil. It is entirely out of harmony with the covenant, and with all the grace of which the sabbath was the sign. A man would pull his ox, or ass, or sheep out of a pit on the sabbath, but he judged the Lord of the sabbath for healing on that day. They "condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). "They watched him if he would heal him on the sabbath, that they might accuse him" (Mark 3:2). They "took counsel against him, how they might destroy him" (Mark 3:6). The ruler of the synagogue was "indignant because Jesus healed on the sabbath" (Luke 13:14). "The Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill him because he had done these things on sabbath" (John 5:16). It is this kind of spirit which is set forth figuratively in the gathering of sticks for a fire. Nothing could be more contrary to the true character of God's sabbath than the activity of a hard, censorious and judicial spirit,. The mind that is ready to pull up tares is in great danger of pulling up the wheat also. Hence the repeated injunctions of Scripture not to judge (see Matthew 7:1 - 5; Romans 14:10 - 13; 1 Corinthians 4:5). "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. Remit and it shall be remitted to you" (Luke 6:37). This is the true spirit of the dispensation, and any violation of it will be visited retributively in the government of God. "For with the same measure with which ye mete it shall be measured to you again". The man who was exacting with his fellow-bondman, after being forgiven much himself, was delivered to the tormentors. We are shocked to think of persons being burned at the stake, but we do not always remember that a hard and ungracious spirit that judges and condemns, and is unforgiving, is exactly the spirit that would burn a man at the stake, and think to serve God in doing it!

If God has made Himself known as a Rest-giver, and as the God of all grace, we may be sure that He regards seriously any spirit or conduct that is contrary to this in His people. In the case before us, those who found the man looked at the matter very gravely, for they "brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to the whole assembly" (verse 33). It was needful for all to take account of it. "And they put him in custody, for it was not declared what should be done to him" (verse 34). The matter was felt to be of sufficient importance to call for the attention of "the whole assembly", and they, in their turn, felt that the case must be referred to Jehovah for His decision. All serves to show that there was something specially instructive and significant in the incident; it was in no wise a minor or ordinary offence. And the consequences visited upon the offender emphasise this, for the mind of Jehovah was made known that "the whole

assembly shall stone him with stones outside the camp" (verse 35). All had to repudiate in the most solemn manner what had come to light. I believe this man represents in a figurative way the legal spirit such as became active in the Galatian assemblies under influence which the apostle Paul pronounced accursed. This spirit leads to persecution (Galatians 4:29), and biting and devouring one another (Galatians 5:15), and provoking and envying one another (Galatians 5:26). There is no sabbath on this line, but much kindling of fires!

The legal and judicial spirit being judged by "the whole assembly" as something entirely out of harmony with the grace of the covenant, makes way for the institution of what next follows. The children of Israel were bidden to make them tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach to the tassel of the corners "a lace of blue". (See verses 37 - 41). We see in this that what is according to the mind of God in His people will always be marked by the heavenly colour. The outward covering of the ark of testimony as it was carried through the wilderness was "a cloth wholly of blue" (Numbers 4:6); If we want to understand the "blue" our hearts must give themselves to the contemplation of Christ. He was "out of heaven"; He said to the Jews, "I am from above"; He was even while here, "the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13). The "lace of blue" suggests the heavenly as it has been seen in Christ. We are to make provision in a spiritual way for that to be always before us, "that ye may look upon it" (verse 39). We cannot go back now to be Old Testament saints, for the heavenly One has come in, and what is true in Him is now to characterise us. God would have us never to forget that "such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones" (1 Corinthians 15:48). One would like to encourage even the youngest believer on the Lord Jesus to cherish the thought of being heavenly because Christ is heavenly.

The "lace of blue" was not for others to see. The Pharisees took it up in this way, and enlarged the borders of their garments for a religious show before others. But the divine intent was that the wearer of the garments should look upon the "lace of blue". It was "that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Jehovah, and do them". To us now Christ has become the great divine commandment; the whole character of our walk is to be determined by how He walked as the heavenly One. Attaching "the lace of blue" to the corners of our garments means that we accept that as the standard which divine grace would ever keep before us. This is something very different from "the lusts of your own heart and your own eyes". It would signify that new affections have begun to work, and the eyes have a new kind

of vision. As Christ thus comes into the view of the heart it settles a thousand questions and difficulties at once.

The blessedness of the heavenly had dawned upon the soul of John the Baptist when he said, "He who comes from above is above all. He who has his origin in the earth is of the earth, and speaks as of the earth. He who comes out of heaven is above all" (John 3:31). John was himself one of the best samples of what was of the earth, but he came into view of another order of Man in Christ — One from above and out of heaven — and he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease".

We suffer, and God's testimony suffers, because we give so much place to the man who has his origin in the earth. Very often, alas! the red rag of self-importance gets a place instead of the lace of blue. It is a great moment when we really give the heavenly a place, and it becomes a fixed principle in the soul that the heavenly is to increase, and the earthly to decrease. And this is to be before us at every corner of our garments — at the personal corner, and the domestic corner, and the business corner, and the assembly corner! The "lace of blue" is to be there, bringing to remembrance. It supposes the possibility of forgetting, and how great is the danger of this! It has to be a definite personal exercise that the heavenly shall be kept in our view perpetually; and this not merely in an abstract way, but as something which is to affect us personally, and in all our associations. Thus shall we be holy unto our God (verses 40,41).

NUMBERS 16

Numbers 16

It is most important that we should be preserved in the recognition of Christ as Lord, and of His service of grace as Priest, and that we should be kept in true subjection to Him. Satan is specially working in Christendom to stir up rebellion against Christ as Lord and as Priest, and this will develop into complete apostasy. Jude speaks of some as having “perished in the gainsaying of Core”; so that what is before us in this chapter is a fore-shadowing of things which mark “the end of time”.

The standard of revolt was raised by a Kohathite — one who had a peculiarly favoured place in Israel — and by certain sons of Reuben; and they were able to secure the support of no less than 250 “princes of the assembly, summoned to the council, men of renown” (verses 1,2). It makes us think of what Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “From among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). In this case many “princes” were drawn into the current of evil, representing those who have a name — leading brethren, as we should say. It shows how watchful we all need to be, even those who have been honoured by God, and have thus acquired place and influence amongst His people. It is even said that “Korah gathered *the whole assembly* against” Moses and Aaron. The general state was such as to be readily acted on by evil influence. It is usually the case that leaders in rebellion get prominence by being bold enough to voice what is already in many minds.

There is great gain in being under authority, but to act on our own wills is the road to destruction, as we see here. God has vested authority in Jesus; He has made Him Lord and Christ for the blessing of men; it is to our true advantage to be subject to Him. Calling on the Lord out of a pure heart implies that we are in holy, happy submission to Him, and that we have a deep sense of needing His control and support continually. We need to watch against any influence that would take us away from faithful allegiance to Him; He alone is our resource in a dark day. We shall have no power to follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, save as we call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Then being “strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus” is to prove the gain of His priestly support. But the Korahs not only miss all this, but are in positive revolt against it. Rebellion in the sphere where divine light shines has usually to clothe itself with some semblance of piety. Korah and his band professed to be standing for the holy character of the assembly! They said, “It is enough; for all the assembly, all of them are holy, and Jehovah is among them; and why do ye lift

up yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah?" (verse 3). What could be more specious, or better calculated to deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting? (Romans 16: 18). And yet it was the language of audacious rebels who were setting themselves up against divine authority exercised in grace, and who were minded to overturn what Jehovah had appointed, in order to get a place for themselves which He had not given them. They might have found salvation in the recognition of the place God had given to Moses and Aaron — both typical of Christ — but instead of that they were insubordinate and perished.

"When Moses heard this, he fell on his face" (verse 4). Three times in this chapter we find him in this most expressive attitude. How marked the contrast between Korah who "made bold", and Moses who "fell on his face"! It signified that he left himself, and the whole matter, in the hands of God. For men to assume to be "holy", and for them to be recognised by God as such, are two very different things. Moses had a deep sense that God would decide the matter, and he was in no hurry to be vindicated; he could afford to wait until "to-morrow". The long-suffering of the Lord today is that even opposers may have an opportunity to acknowledge the truth (2 Timothy 2:25,26); there is space given for repentance.

But the man who fell on his face had the mind of God, and he discerned what was really working under the pretence of zeal for the holiness of the assembly. It was Korah and his band who wanted to lift up themselves above the congregation of Jehovah. Those who accuse others often expose thereby what is active in their own hearts. Moses, as a prophet of God, laid bare the secrets of these men's hearts. They were not content with their divinely appointed and honoured place as Levites; they sought the priesthood also (verses 8 - 11). After all that we have read of the Levites in this book it is humbling to find that amongst a class so honoured by God there should arise revolt of such a character that it was visited by one of the most terrible punishments which are recorded in Scripture.

The sin of Korah and his band was that they sought the dignity of priesthood for their own fleshly exaltation. Their speeches were fair, but their real object was to unclothe Aaron of the glory with which God had invested him. The boldness of the flesh is such that it will venture to take, the highest and holiest place without any divine title, in order to glorify itself. There is no greater sin in Christendom than that men should claim to be priests, as a different class from believers in general, so that no others can minister to God as they can, nor can spiritual privileges and blessings be obtained save by their means. It is assuming a place and dignity which belongs to Christ alone as the Mediator and the Priest.

There is a priesthood which attaches to all believers, who are made by Jesus Christ "priests to his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6), and who are being "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:6). But this priesthood would never be coveted by a Korah, for it gives one no special place amongst men, nor does it exalt one above his brethren. The whole hierarchical system would fall to the ground if it were recognised that everyone who has the Spirit is entitled to serve as a priest, and every spiritual person is qualified to do so. The Korahs do not want a priesthood which grace alone confers, and which is the common dignity of all who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. They want a priesthood which will distinguish them from ordinary Christians, and which will attach to them a special sanctity in the eyes of men. This is abhorrent to God, for it involves the setting aside of the distinctive place of the Lord Jesus Christ in the economy of grace just as definitely as the pretensions of Korah involved the setting aside of the distinctive place of Moses and Aaron in that day. It is a grievous sin, which will be fully exposed and judged "to-morrow". The epistle to the Hebrews dwells much on the priestly office of Christ, and it is to be noted that though there are several passages in that epistle which imply that the saints, as being kindred with Christ, are priests, the epistle gives the title of priest to Christ alone. The Spirit of God, no doubt foreseeing that many Korahs would arise to claim the honour, was minded to preserve His distinctive glory in this character.

"And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, We will not come up! ... thou must make thyself altogether a ruler over us" (verses 12, 13). Jude says of some that they "despise lordship, and speak railingly against dignities". This is the spirit which will be headed up in "the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2:8); it is the refusal of divine authority, in whatever form it may be set forth. Primarily, of course, authority is set forth in the Lord, but it is found also in those who act under His authority. We are told that before He went away He gave "to his bondmen the authority" (Mark 13:34),

so that the principle of authority is here amongst those who are in subjection to Him. Woe be to those who despise it! The fact that it is allied with meekness and gentleness does not detract from it, though it adds to the guilt of those who despise it. So that two entirely different, and apparently mutually opposed, lines of action are seen in this chapter as moving in concert. There is the grasping at religious power in Korah, and the setting aside of divine authority in Dathan and Abiram. One is ritualism, which brings everything under a sacerdotal caste that lays claim to priesthood. The other is

rationalism, which exalts the human mind and will not bow to the authority of the Lord, or of the Scriptures. The two things are very diverse one from the other, but they are both forms of rebellion against Christ. One appeals to the religious element in man and the other to the intellectual element. But both will perish together.

Korah and the 250 princes were told to bring censers and incense before Jehovah, All religious pretensions are very soon going to be tested by God Himself. Moses and Aaron were on that occasion in a very small minority, for "Korah gathered the whole assembly against them to the entrance of the tent of meeting" (verse 19). The rebels were self-deceived to the last moment; apparently their courage never failed them. But at that moment "the glory of Jehovah appeared to all the assembly". When evil fully declares itself God's glory is sure to, appear. When there is a direct issue between what is of God and what is opposed to Him, He never fails to appear. He does not leave it uncertain as to what He approves or what He condemns. The whole assembly was at this moment influenced by Korah, and identified with him in opposition to Moses and Aaron. Therefore all were subject to judgment when the glory appeared,

for it appeared as identifying itself with what was despised and rebelled against.

"And Jehovah spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from the midst of this assembly, and I will consume them in a moment" (verses 20, 21). The persons of whom He could approve in this solemn crisis were those against whom the whole assembly was gathered. The mass of the people deserved to be consumed in a moment. But Moses and Aaron represented something altogether different from strict justice. They represented God known as dwelling amongst His people in grace, of which the priesthood was the great witness. It was the priestly grace seen in Moses and Aaron that saved the situation, and alone preserved such a people from being consumed. What they rebelled against was, in truth, their only hope. The whole assembly had to learn that the intercession of Moses and Aaron was their only preservation from perishing. "And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh! shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wrath with the whole assembly?" (verse 22).

It is beautiful to see Moses and Aaron on their faces interceding for such a people. They had drunk into the true spirit of priesthood, as set up by God in grace on behalf of an imperfect and erring people. The very office supposed that one would be needed who could offer sacrifices for sins. The plate of pure gold — the holy diadem — which was upon the front of Aaron's turban,

inscribed with "Holiness to Jehovah", was that he might "bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all the gifts of their holy things; and it shall be continually on his forehead, that they may be accepted before Jehovah" (Exodus 28:38). Even their "holy things" would have iniquity connected with them which Aaron was to bear. All this showed that in instituting priesthood God had in mind to deal with His people, not as they might deserve in strict justice, but according to provisions of grace which were made available for them. It showed that God took account of a condition in His people that was the result of sin, and that, according to the very order of the dispensation, He had provided to meet that condition in grace.

In proposing to consume the people in a moment God was really putting Moses and Aaron to the test, to see whether they were imbued with the spirit of grace, of which the priesthood was such a blessed witness. They answered to the test beautifully, as no doubt Jehovah knew that they would. He was more glorified by their attitude and spirit on this occasion than He would have been by consuming the people in a moment. Their action justified Him in having given them the place He had. But grace does not set aside the righteous government of God, nor stay its course with reference to those who may have constituted themselves in a special way enemies of grace. Moses and Aaron were near enough to God to recognise that the time had come for Korah and his band to be judged, and therefore they made a difference between them and the whole assembly who were, for the time, deceived and misled. Korah's was a sin unto death, and they did not pray for him. Paul did not pray for Alexander the smith; he said, "The Lord will render to him according to his works" (2 Timothy 4:14). Priestly intercession is never indiscriminate. The time may have come for some to be definitively judged while the general ways of God may still be in mercy and grace.

The people generally were spared at the solemn moment we are considering, but conditionally on departing from the tents of those wicked men. It is on that principle there is preservation today. Korahs, Dathans and Abirams have long been rising up against the divine mediatorial and priestly system as established in Christ, and "the whole assembly" has been more or less infected by the spirit of rebellion. But as "the end of the time" has drawn nigh the glory of God has appeared, and has exposed the true character of the influences which have been at work. We are now in the time when a way of escape is pointed out in our being told to "withdraw from iniquity", and to purify ourselves from vessels to dishonour in separating ourselves from them, according to 2 Timothy 2:19,21.

In chapter 15 "the whole assembly" had to stone the sabbath breaker, but in chapter 16 those who would escape from perishing had to depart from the wicked men who were just about to fall under divine judgment. This corresponds with the difference between 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Timothy 2. In the former case the wicked person had to be removed from amongst the saints; the evil could then be purged out, and the assembly regain its true character as unleavened. But in the latter case those who name the Name of the Lord are called upon to withdraw from iniquity. The general state of things in the Christian profession is now such that no hope is held out in Scripture of it being remedied by any action of the faithful, but they can still "withdraw from iniquity", and as owning the authority of the Lord they are under obligation to do so. It is in keeping with this that God's people are called upon to *come out* of Babylon that they may not have fellowship in her sins, and receive of her plagues (Revelation 18: 4). It is too late now to correct what is wrong in Christendom; the sentence of judgment has been pronounced upon it; the only thing that can be done is to "depart" from that which is about to be judged unsparingly.

The "iniquity" seen in Korah, Dathan and Abiram was prophetic of much that is abroad today. Everyone knows that in the greater part of Christendom there are those who claim to have priesthood in a special way, and who wield tremendous influence over those who acknowledge their claim. Then, on the other hand, the authority of the true Moses is set at naught by the Dathans and Abirams. Liberty of conscience often means that men claim a right to think what they like, and to do as they please, in regard to religious matters. Whereas every professed Christian is under obligation to be subject in every way, and in every detail, to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many who do not acknowledge the claims of a false priesthood are found identified with human systems which, however well intentioned their founders may have been, do in practice and principle set aside the order of the house of God, and the authority of Him who is Son over it. But these things will not stand when tested by God; they are about to be swallowed up, and spiritual safety lies in departing from them.

In this solemn case Jehovah made "a new thing" (verse 30, literally, created a creation. See marginal reading of New Translation). "And the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up, and their house-holds, and all the men that belonged to Korah, and all their property. And they went down, they and all that they had, alive into Sheol, and the earth covered them; and they perished from among the congregation And there came a fire from Jehovah, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that had presented incense" (verses 32,33,35). No such terrible judgment had been seen before. It foreshadowed

the certain doom of all religious assumption, and insubjection to the authority of Christ. And it is to be observed that Jehovah would have the altar to carry the abiding witness of this judgment. He would not have any to approach Him without being reminded of what had taken place. It is a terrible thing for men to attempt to approach God in the flesh; it means destruction (see verses 36 - 40).

It is happy to recall, though it is not mentioned here, that there was an intervention of sovereign mercy even at such a moment of terrible judgment. "But the children of Korah died not" (Numbers 26:11). *They* were preserved to sing beautiful psalms, and to be door-keepers in the house of God. It seems to suggest that they had so learned the holiness of God by the terrible doom of their father that they could be trusted to preserve His house from any intrusion of what was unsuitable. And, as having experienced His saving mercy, they could sing sweetly His praises.

We get first in this chapter a day of insolent rebellion; then a "morrow" of vindication for Moses and Aaron, and of unsparing judgment on the rebels. Then another "morrow" follows on which "the whole assembly of the children of Israel murmured ... against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of Jehovah". The assembly gathered together against them. How evident it is that the mind of the flesh is unchanged even by witnessing most terrible judgments; it remains essentially "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). Is it not certain that if the glory of God appears in relation to such a people — apart from what He is as made known in mediatorial and priestly grace — it can only consume them. God would have this to be clearly understood. If Moses and Aaron had not been there on behalf of the people who despised them those people would have been immediately destroyed. God repeats this twice in one chapter to impress it deeply upon us. But Moses and Aaron were there as representing what God was in an economy marked by redemption, atonement, and by many provisions for God's glory in relation to a state of evil on man's part. He would teach us that, apart from the mediatorship and priesthood of Christ, there can be nothing for rebellious man but to be consumed in a moment!

"And Moses and Aaron went before the tent of meeting And they fell on their faces" (verses 43,45). They fell on their faces in recognition of the justice of the condemnation pronounced, but yet in a spirit of intercession for the rebellious people. And Moses, divinely taught, thinks at once of atonement. Without commandment or precedent, for there had been no provision in the law for such rebellion as was now manifesting itself, he bids Aaron, "Take the censer, and put fire thereon from off the altar, and lay on incense, and carry it

quickly to the assembly, and make atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from Jehovah: the plague is begun" (verse 46).

The fire from the altar was the fire which, if it came in contact with rebellious flesh, would consume it in a moment. But that very fire, coming into contact with the precious perfections of Christ, only brought out sweet odour. This scripture is unique as being the only passage, so far as I know, where the thought of atonement is directly connected with incense. Leviticus 16:12,13 comes near to it, for Aaron was to "put the incense upon the fire before Jehovah, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat, which is upon the testimony, that he die not". No doubt the day of atonement was in Moses' mind when he told Aaron to "Take *the* censer". He was to take the one golden censer (Hebrews 9:4), used on the day of atonement. How it would speak to God of what had happened on that great day! The blood of the sin-offering was taken into the holy of holies, but before Aaron took in the blood he took in "the censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before Jehovah, and both his hands full of fragrant incense beaten small". That incense was carried in on the ground that atonement had been made by the death of the bullock of the sin-offering. The blood was carried in afterwards by Aaron, and sprinkled on the front of the mercy-seat and before it. All its divine value was brought before God. But before Aaron took in the blood on his finger he went in with "both his hands full of fragrant incense". The blood makes atonement, but Christ was not only great enough to do that, but to give an answer to God in the place of atonement which was commensurate with all the greatness and preciousness of His holy Person. It is of this that the incense speaks. It is not only that God has been glorified in all His holy claims with regard to that which had dishonoured Him by the death and blood of the Sin-offering, but there is *excess*. An answer has been given to Him in the very place of atonement which is most fragrant. The sin is consumed, typically, by the burning of the sin-offering outside the camp, but the holy fragrance of the perfect answer which Christ has given to God in the place of atonement goes into the holiest of all and covers the mercy-seat. It brings before us what is perhaps the greatest and most precious thought in connection with Christ as making atonement. (Any interested reader may refer to "An Outline of the Book of Leviticus", chapter 16, for more detailed remarks on this great and holy subject.)

Now all this was in the mind of Moses, or at any rate in the mind of the Holy Spirit, when he told Aaron to take the censer, and lay on incense, and make atonement. "And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed" (verse 48). How wonderful to think that Christ as Priest — the true Aaron — is standing today between the dead and the living with the

golden censer and the fragrant incense! Rebellious flesh in Christendom has deserved to be consumed, but that — sad and solemn as it is — cannot invalidate the precious fact that Christ as Mediator has made God known as acting towards sinful men in infinite grace, and Christ as Priest still stands between the dead and the living with the golden censer and the fragrant incense. What a wondrous moment it is in the ways of God!

This second “morrow” is, I believe, peculiarly typical of the present time. Daring rebellion has come to light in the sphere of Christian profession, but what is dominant in the present ways of God is the grace set forth in Christ as the true Moses and as the true Aaron. On this wondrous “morrow” the glory of God is maintained on entirely different ground from the destruction of the rebels. It is seen as secured by Christ on the ground of His death, and on the ground that all His personal perfection has been brought into the place of sin’s judgment, and has gone up as fragrant incense to God. He brings it before God in a priestly way, and all the forbearance and long-suffering of well-nigh two thousand years is based upon it. Intercession founded on sacrifice can be made in divine righteousness for those who deserve to be consumed. This aspect of priesthood comes into evidence in face of murmurings and rebellion. It was seen in perfection in the Lord, and His beloved servant Stephen fully caught the spirit of it; it was seen, too, in Paul when he says, “May it not be imputed to them” (2 Timothy 4:16).

If any are preserved in life today, or even preserved from being cut off in judgment, it is through the priestly intercession of Christ. And His saints are privileged to share in that holy service. Judgment is imminent, but priestly prayers, breathing out the fragrance of Christ, are still between the dead and the living. We might truly say that the plague has begun. Infidelity, superstition, strong delusions, are abroad on all hands. These things are not simply human folly, or Satan’s power over men; they are often judicial and retributive actions of God, consequent upon Christ not being owned as Lord or honoured as Priest. But the intercession of Christ in heaven, and of His saints on earth, is still staying the plague, and preserving some alive. The very people who are rebellious against Christ, and who despise His saints, owe their lives to Him, and to the prayers of His people.

NUMBERS 17

Numbers 17

There is a climax of evil in chapter 16, prefiguring the rebellion of the last days in Christendom, upon which terrible judgment is about to fall. But in chapters 17 to 20 we see how God provides for the bringing about of conditions suitable to Himself in His people. The forty years spoken of in chapter 14:34 are passed over. God is not concerned to give us in detail the history of unbelief, though He has given us enough to let us see plainly its true character. But He has shown us its certain end, either as consumed in the wilderness, or as swallowed up in judgment when it becomes openly rebellious and apostate, and this looks on prophetically, as we have said, to the last days.

But as the end of the forty years drew near God was pleased to give testimony to what was in His mind in regard to His people, the subjects of His calling, and whom He intended to bring into the land. Those who are the subjects of God's work have the flesh in them, and it is no better than the flesh in other people, and this necessitates that they should learn it, and become morally separated from it. They are also exposed to temptations and defilement in the wilderness. But we shall find in the chapters which are now before us that God makes provision for every need that arises, having in view all that is in His own purpose in regard to them. Special features of divine grace appear in these chapters which had not been previously known, and these things are prophetic of God's gracious ways with His people today. The wilderness history of the church has brought to light the same forms of unbelief and rebellion as appeared in Israel. But God has had His called ones all through, whom He has kept by His power. And as the end of the time of testimony in the wilderness has approached He has brought before His people what was needed to perfect His work in their souls. I have no doubt that a great deal of the typical teaching of Scripture has the last days of the assembly in view; indeed, its meaning has not been understood, or brought out in ministry, until recent times. But when it is spiritually understood we can see clearly how it indicates the mind of God in a way which bears in a special way on the needs of the last days, and which develops much instruction for us which is helpful in the exercises of our own day.

The Spirit of God makes certain features of the truth prominent now because they are specially suited to further the work of God in His people. But every one of those features formed part of the truth from the beginning, and can be found in Scripture, and clearly established by the authority of Scripture. Many

parts of the truth have been lost sight of, or obscured, for many centuries, but in the wisdom and goodness of God they are being, brought forward at the end of the church period in view of His thoughts being made good spiritually in His saints. There is a timeliness and suitability about what the Spirit says to the assemblies, though everything that He says is always in perfect accord with what was made known at the beginning. Now the way in which the priesthood of Christ is brought before us in the section of Numbers upon which we are now entering seems to me to correspond with the way in which God has called attention to Christ as Priest in recent times.

There can be no doubt on the part of any intelligent believer that during the last century there has been a revival of the truth of the house of God, and desires have been awakened in many hearts to take up the spiritual service which rightly pertains to that house. But all such exercises stand in connection with Christ being known as Priest; they are really dependent on His being thus known; for approach to God is by Him who is "a great priest over the house of God". I believe it has been one of the special ministries of the Spirit of God in recent times to call attention to Christ as Priest in a way that corresponds with how He is typified in Aaron in Numbers 17. And this with a view to saints being qualified to carry on, and to support, the service of God in His house as typified in Numbers 18. So that I apprehend there is much instruction in these chapters which has a direct bearing in a special way at the present time.

It is important that we should notice the form which murmurings had taken, and which it was God's intention to bring to an end. There was an assumption that all the assembly were holy, and Jehovah was among them, and when judgment had been executed on flagrant evil "the whole assembly of the children of Israel murmured on the morrow against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of Jehovah" (16:3,41). It is a common thing for the flesh to exalt itself by assuming to be divinely privileged. It was the characteristic sin of the Jew. "The assembly", "the people of God", the thought of holiness, and of God being among His people — all most precious and divine realities — are seen here as used to give importance to the flesh, and to justify murmurings against what was ordained of God for the blessing of His people. How subtle is all this! But it is all naked and laid bare to His eyes with whom we have to do, and He would lay it bare to our eyes also. This is how the word of God helps us to judge the flesh. Whatever favour may be conferred, flesh remains flesh, and has to be judged as such, "I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (Psalm 82:6,7). It is a solemn thing to attach the privileges of the children of God to ourselves in a fleshly way, because, sooner or later, we shall have to learn that death is upon us. In the

service of God it is only that which comes to pass through the priestly grace of Christ that has a living character.

The calling of Aaron to be priest, and what was necessary to his consecration, is seen in Exodus 28, Exodus 29, while his actual consecration is described in Leviticus 8. All that is purely on the divine side, and made known to the assembly as the mind of God. The truth can always be presented *as truth* to the people of God, but it is not experimentally known so as to become effective apart from its necessity being brought home to us. In the chapter now before us we see divine means being used in grace to bring the people of God into line with His own thoughts, so that murmurings might cease from before Him. He brought home to them that, in relation to His holy service, there was nothing vital in *them*. It was only to be found in the man of His choice. But it was there for their advantage. In learning this the flesh would be truly judged, and murmurings would cease.

All the children of Israel were brought representatively before Jehovah in twelve staves, one for each father's house. And Aaron's name was written on the staff of Levi: "And it shall come to pass that the man whom I shall choose, his staff shall bud forth And it came to pass, when on the morrow Moses went into the tent of the testimony, behold the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and ripened almonds" (verses 5, 8). It was thus made manifest that "before the testimony" all were dead and barren save one. One was marked by distinct evidence of life, and this not life of a natural order, but life out of death. The almond tree is the first of all trees to bud after the winter season; its name in Hebrew has reference to this. So that, even in an ordinary way, the almond speaks of resurrection. But for buds and blossoms and ripened almonds to spring out of a dead staff adds greatly to the force of the figure. The staff which thus budded forth was "the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi". God would not have the thought of priesthood to be attached to the natural man, or to the man after the flesh; it attaches to Christ as the risen and heavenly One. As such He continues for ever; He is "constituted ... according to power of indissoluble life" (Hebrews 7:16).

The two men in shining raiment said to the women at the sepulchre, "Why seek ye the living one among the dead? He is not here, but is risen" (Luke 24:5,6). He had been singled out from all others as the living One, and this by resurrection from among the dead. How could one be truly *living* save as entirely outside the domain of death? Jesus, the Son of God, is there; He is "the living one"; and as such He is Priest on our behalf by God's appointment. This is the lesson of Numbers 17, and though it is a lesson taught by grace it

involves that we take home to ourselves the solemn reality that death is upon us.

The two last verses of the chapter show that the lesson of the staves had been learned, at any rate on the negative side. It may be said, indeed, that the value of the provision of grace was not yet understood or appreciated, but the need of it was keenly felt. This is the first step on the way to appreciation of grace. "And the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, Lo, we expire, we perish, we all perish. Every one that comes at all near to the tabernacle of Jehovah shall die: shall we then expire altogether?" No wonder they said this when "Moses brought out all the staves from, before Jehovah to all the children of Israel, and they looked and took each one his staff" (verse 9). I have no doubt it was intended that each of them should look at his own staff; each had to realise that his staff was barren and dead. None of us get the gain of the priesthood of Christ without going in some measure through this experience. Those who accept the lesson of the staves do, in a moral sense, expire, and those who expire murmur no more. They look now to Christ, with an ever deepening appreciation of the advantage gained by having such a Priest. It is the lesson of Romans 7, but learned in this type in relation to the tabernacle service of God. We can only come "at all near to the tabernacle of Jehovah" as supported by Christ, and in virtue of His priestly service in the "power of indissoluble life".

If we think that we can pray acceptably, or praise, or worship without the advantage of Christ as the living Priest, it is really a presumptuous murmuring against the divine order in grace, and we shall have to learn the barrenness of all that we attempt in this way. We shall have to take our dead staves away as having no vitality before God. But Aaron's staff, is kept before the testimony, a precious and abiding witness to the power of life in the risen and heavenly Christ. His life is continually active on our behalf, so that by His grace and support we may come "near to the tabernacle of Jehovah" in a living way. We saw at the end of chapter 16 that the priest "stood between the dead and the living", and it is still so. There is much in Christendom that professes to be the service of God, but only that is living which is sustained in vitality by Christ as Priest. And only those are sustained by Him who have learned the deadness of their own staves, and have through this experience come to appreciate the advantage of a living Priest.

So it is not only that atonement has been made, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, but there is a living Priest out of death divinely chosen, who is seen here, in type, as bringing forth "before the testimony" a varied, expression of the evidence of life. Buds, blossoms, and ripened almonds are all

there, suggesting development from what is initial in the way of fruit for God to full maturity. There is thus set forth, in figure, how through the priesthood of Christ the fruit of life is secured in service Godward. Not in each case the same development, for babes and young men and fathers would each have their own measure, but each yielding something that is the outcome of Christ being known as Priest. I trust we can all realise how acceptable to God would be such buds and blossoms and fruit. How entirely it puts all acceptable service Godward on the footing of what Christ is. We part company, so to speak, with the murmurer as being under death; we approach God and serve Him according to our living Priest, and murmurings cease.

Christ is God's own selection, singled out as having every feature and qualification that makes Him suitable to represent before God the people of His calling. For the chosen man of Numbers 17: 5 speaks of Christ as now before God in manhood after fulfilling all that was typified by the sacrificial work of the day of atonement. The full value of His death is before God, as we see in figure at the end of chapter 16, but He is now out of death in the power of endless life, and as the true Aaron He is Priest on behalf of His saints.

There is great gain in seeing that Christ is Priest as well as Mediator. As Mediator we contemplate Him as having become Man on God's part towards men, that He might make God known to men in wondrous grace. But as Priest He is seen as having taken a place on man's side Godward. The fact that both characters are sustained by One blessed Person ensures that each shall correspond perfectly with the other. As Priest, God has chosen Him with full certainty of having in Him and through Him every fruit of life in which He could delight as coming to light in the service of His house. The knowledge of Him thus, would greatly affect the people of God if they allowed it to operate in their souls. There is a huge nominal profession of Christianity, but the apprehension of Christ as Priest — of the place which He holds on man's part Godward — is what marks off the living from the dead. God is not looking to the flesh for anything, but He is giving testimony to Christ as the true representative of what is in His mind in regard to His people, and the One through whose priestly grace it can come out in them. When that testimony is accepted all murmurings cease. Murmurings arise from flesh wanting a place with God and refusing to admit that it is under death and judgment before Him. The history we have already gone over should be enough to prove that wherever and however flesh is tested it comes out as contrary and rebellious. And, as we have seen, all this history has what corresponds with it in the lessons which we have to learn as to our own flesh. But God puts over against all the murmurings and rebellion of the flesh the wonderful testimony of what He has chosen to have before Him in Christ. That is the clear proof that God is

not looking to the flesh or the natural man to yield anything that will be for His pleasure. If He has to take account of that man at all it can only be as one righteously subject to death. The repeated words, "that they may not die", and "that there come no wrath any more upon the children of Israel" (Numbers 17:10; Numbers 18:3; Numbers 18:5; Numbers 18:7) show plainly that for a people in the flesh there is no escape from death. But there is a powerful working by God on the line of grace using the testimony which He gives as to Christ as Priest to bring to an end the activities of the flesh.

We must not suppose that Israel could enter at that time into the meaning or spiritual import of what is here recorded. "For as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction" (Romans 15:4). The Spirit of God has before Him to teach us lessons of the greatest importance, and He has put them in this form as being the best and most forcible way of presenting them. We see God bringing to light the contrariety of the flesh, so that it is ever the subject of His holy judgment. But we see, too, that God had something else before Him all the time, and that He was continually bringing it forward. How many types of Christ and of His death have come before us in this and the previous books! Again and again we have seen that on the part of the people blessing was forfeited and judgment merited, but that they were spared and delivered on grounds which were typical of Christ and of His death. Now in presence of murmuring and rebellion God chooses to let all Israel know that His thoughts centre in a Priest who is before Him in the power of life out of death. The object in view being to dissociate us in our expectations from every other man, and to lead us to see that we can count upon that Priest as being on our behalf. It is in giving us to see how beneficial it is to have Christ on our side that God makes murmurings to cease. In the budding of Aaron's staff God intimates that whatever is vital is the product of the place that Christ holds on our behalf. Nothing comes of flesh but sin and death, but Christ is for us in priestly grace and service so that sympathy, help, salvation in a practical sense, are available so that we may be supported in suitability to the testimony of God. The budding forth of Aaron's staff is the token that God does not look to the flesh for anything. He has chosen One who in priestly grace is available for His people, and who is the alone Source of what is vital and fruitful. The budding staff is a token of pure grace, making available for us all that is needed. It is God's mind that we should draw near to the sanctuary, and also that we should go through the wilderness as those who are sustained by the living grace of Christ as Priest.

"Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people; for, in that himself has suffered, being

tempted, he is able to help those that are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:17,18). "Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. For we have not a high priest not able to sympathise with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart. Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help" (Hebrews 4:14 - 16). "But he, because of his continuing for ever, has the priesthood unchangeable. Whence also he is able to save completely those who approach by him to God, always living to intercede for them. For such a high priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:24 - 26). In being helped and saved by One who always lives to intercede for us we become morally detached from the flesh, and its murmurings cease. We learn that grace is in supremacy, and we approach with boldness to avail ourselves of divine support. We thus come into evidence as "the living", who move through the wilderness as partakers of heavenly Calling and as holy brethren. We have still wilderness lessons to learn, and warnings to heed, but in the apprehension that Christ is Priest for us we learn to identify ourselves with what is going through into the purpose of God as sustained by the grace of a living and heavenly Intercessor. Nothing else is going through save what He sustains. Nor has it ever been the thought of God that anything else should go through. None are really "the living" in the wilderness but those who get the virtue of what has budded forth in Christ as the living Priest.

So that this chapter is most important as giving us the secret of how God's people come near to the tabernacle, and also how they can be sustained in the wilderness in a way that corresponds with heavenly calling. A real and vital work of God in the soul is needed for the apprehension and appreciation of Christ as Priest. Where He is felt to be indispensable, and to be the living Source from day to day of help and grace, so that one is consciously sustained in happy and holy relations with God, there can be no question that one is partaker of heavenly calling. God calls our attention by the budding staff to the virtue that is in Christ as the living Priest. He fully estimates what is there for us, for it is there by His own choice and appointment. When we appreciate it, and begin to prove the gain of it, we become "the living". Priestly grace and intercession in Christ is the source and sustainment of everything of which God can take account as being in living relation to himself. It is only that which differs from murmuring and rebellious flesh, and only that which has any moral suitability to go through into the land which God has in view for His people.

Christ was clearly not a priest officially in the days of His flesh; it was as risen and in heaven that He took up the office. But the grace of priesthood was *illustrated* in a marvellous way in His pathway and service here. There was not only the mediatorial declaration of God in grace, but the priestly sympathy and compassion of a blessed Man who could enter feelingly into all that pressed upon men. There was virtue there that could be drawn upon — a power of life that made whole those who came in contact with it — a hand that was quickly outstretched to support a sinking disciple — an Intercessor that faith might not fail. All these things illustrate the grace which is now available in Him as Priest on high. It is more readily accessible in Him now than it was in the days of His flesh, and millions can get virtue out of Him at one and the same moment all over the world. As He is appreciated and drawn upon murmurings cease, and the people of God live by what is available in Him.

It is to be noted that Aaron's staff was not altogether personal to himself; it was "for the house of Levi" (verse 8). The grace that is resident in Christ as Priest, and that is available, for the people of God, is to characterise the whole priestly and levitical family.

God sets up amongst His people a service which corresponds with what is found in perfection in Christ as the High Priest of our confession. Intercessory service goes on amongst the saints, sympathies and succour are found there, and the whole levitical service is imbued with the Spirit of Christ as the Head of the tribe of Levi. The whole principle on which ministry is exercised amongst the saints is that the all-various grace of God becomes available for men by means of men. So that it is marked by sympathetic consideration, and by bringing what is of God near to men in such a way that they are encouraged to appropriate it. It is ever to be borne in mind that what God has in view is to detach His people from the flesh with all its murmurings and rebellion by attaching them in appreciative affection to Christ so that they may get the gain of what lives in Him on their behalf. The epistle to the Hebrews was largely written to confirm souls in the knowledge of Christ as the Mediator and the Priest, and to bring them to be consciously possessed of Him as Priest. Hence it is written, "Now a summary of the things of which we are speaking is, *We have* such a one high priest" (Hebrews 8:1). Service is only of value in so far as it tends to put souls in conscious possession of Christ. This alone will effectually alienate us from the man of murmuring and rebellion, and will prepare a dwelling for God even where there has been formerly rebellion (see Psalm 68:18).

Moses was of the tribe of Levi, and if he had borne in mind that the priestly staff of Aaron was "for the house of Levi", he would not have spoken and

acted as he did in chapter 20. Moses and Aaron at that juncture came short of their true glory; they did not believe Jehovah, nor did they hallow Him before the eyes of the children of Israel. And they thereby disqualified themselves for bringing the congregation into the land, They departed for a moment from that in which Jehovah would have been glorified, and the consequences were serious for them. How many of us at one time or another have been cross with the people of God because they displeased us! But it is priesthood that helps by bringing what is of God on the line of grace into evidence amongst His people. May we believe God in the way in which He speaks to us in Numbers 17, and hallow Him by the way in which we carry ourselves amongst His people! His great thought is "that they may not die", and this can only be secured by their being drawn into the appreciation of Christ as Priest. Everything that is priestly and levitical tends in this direction.

NUMBERS 18

Numbers 18

It is important to see that Christ was not a Priest according to the flesh. He did not belong to the tribe from which alone the priests were selected. But as risen, and in the power of indissoluble life, He is a great Priest over the house of God. In the epistle to the Hebrews there are statements which imply that the holy brethren are priests, for they have liberty to draw nigh to God, and even boldness for entering into the holiest, but it is noticeable that the title of priest is only given to Christ. The saints come into priesthood as being His brethren, as the sons of Aaron became priests in virtue of being kindred with Him. By coming to Christ as the living Stone, rejected by the religious builders, but chosen of God and precious, believers become living stones, and are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:4,5). In His love, and in the value of the redemption which He has accomplished, He has made us a kingdom,

priests to His God and Father (Revelation 1:5,6). So that priesthood is exercised in the power of life out of death, whether in Christ or in the sanctified company of holy brethren who are all of one with Him. This shows the impossibility of connecting priesthood with man after the flesh.

A true and spiritual priesthood comes into view in the chapter now before us. Korah and his band had coveted the priesthood for their own exaltation, and had perished in their rebellion. But on the ground that what was abhorrent to God had been judged the holy service was to go on. It had been judged in the sinners who had forfeited their lives; it had also been judged in another way when Aaron made atonement; and it was now to be judged in a continuous way by the holy priesthood.

It is striking that the first thing said of the priestly house is that they should "bear the iniquity of the sanctuary", and "the iniquity of your priesthood" (verse 1). Iniquity of the sanctuary and the priesthood is not a spiritually normal condition, but it is an actual condition in what answers to this part of the book of Numbers. A time is in view here when iniquity has intruded into both the sanctuary and the priesthood. It is recognised as being there, and it has to be borne in a priestly way. Ability to do this is one practical evidence of life in the priesthood, the proof that they are linked up with Christ as the living Priest typified by Aaron in chapter 17. Evil in the world is not to be wondered at; it is the normal state of things there. But iniquity in the sphere of holy things has to be borne in a priestly way by those who become conscious of it. The pitching of the tabernacle, and Jehovah dwelling in it, set up an altogether

new standard of holiness. And God's thought was that Aaron and his sons should be in accord with this elevated standard, and able to bear in a priestly way anything inconsistent with it.

The seven golden lamps in Revelation 1 - Revelation 3 represent the assemblies as set here responsibly as vessels of sanctuary light. And the Lord is seen as walking in the midst of them in priestly discernment. We might say, in the language of Numbers 18, that He is keeping the charge of the sanctuary. But the one who sees Him in this character falls at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:17). It is the lesson of the staves as learned even by one like the beloved John! If John found himself at the feet of Jesus as dead, we may be quite sure that it is only by His right hand being laid upon us that we can be strengthened for priestly service, or qualified to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary. Aaron's staff for "the house of Levi" set forth that the power of priestly life in Christ the risen One is for the support of all who are kindred with Him by the call and work of God. I have no doubt that the effect of His right hand being laid upon us would be such a spiritual strengthening that we should become capable of viewing things as He views them, and feeling about them as He feels. We should then recognise that iniquity has come into the sphere of holy things, and that we have responsibility in relation to it. We should thus bear it on our spirits in a priestly way.

We shall only be morally separate from "the iniquity of the sanctuary" as we judge it according to the way in which Christ judges it. We know how He felt when merchandise and robbery had intruded themselves into the temple. "His disciples remembered that it is written, The zeal of thy house devours me" (John 2:17). It was true priestly feeling. And in Revelation 2, Revelation 3, we see how He regards things in the assemblies today. Departure from first love, worldliness, evil doctrine, the woman Jezebel permitted to teach, a name to live but still being dead, unwatchfulness, lukewarmness, boastfulness along with extreme spiritual poverty, is all very grievous under the priestly eye of Christ. John, as having the right hand of the living One laid upon him, would see it all, and feel it all, as He did, and was thus fitted to write as the Lord's scribe to the assemblies. One cannot doubt that he bore the iniquity of the sanctuary, as in concert with the Lord's mind about it all. And the overcomer in each assembly would participate in this. One could not be an overcomer without being conscious of what there is to overcome, and feeling the burden of it in a priestly way. I believe this answers to bearing the iniquity of the sanctuary and of the priesthood. The exercise of it is upon the spirit before God.

Paul, writing in view of the last days, in the second epistle to Timothy, speaks of himself as "apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, *according to promise of life*, the life which is in Christ Jesus". He speaks of our Saviour Jesus Christ as having "brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings". He urges upon Timothy to "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus"; he tells him that "if we have died together with him we shall also live together". All this is on the line of the teaching connected with the budding of Aaron's staff. It implies priestly life, intelligence and sensibilities. Where such things exist the Lord will give understanding, and it will be understood that "the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his; and Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). The question is often asked, What is iniquity? It is what the will of man has introduced, contrary to divine order, into the sphere of holy things. If the Lord gives us understanding in all things, as Paul says He will do if we consider what he says, and we have priestly sensibilities, we shall realise how much has been set up in the Christian profession that is not only the product of human infirmity, but is positively contrary both in principle and practice to the revealed mind of God. Those who bear it on their spirits as being iniquity find that a way of practical freedom from it has been opened up in divine faithfulness by the word, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". This is essential if the spiritual service of the house of God is to go on after iniquity has been found in the sphere of holy things. Our link with Christ as the living Priest will be evidenced by holy sensibilities as to what is becoming to the sanctuary and the priesthood. Without such sensibilities one could hardly take the place of being a member of the priestly house; there are no buds of priestly life. Separation from iniquity is essential to priestly service, and there will be no separation from iniquity until it is borne upon the spirit before God as being iniquity.

Then we learn (verses 2 - 4) that the whole "tribe of Levi" is brought near to unite with Aaron in the charge and service of the tent of meeting. Every bit of levitical service is intended by God to "unite" with what is priestly. All ministry of the word has for its object the furtherance of the direct service of God in a priestly way. It unites with the priesthood as promoting holy sensibilities with regard to iniquity, and also as contributing in a positive way to the service of the tent of meeting. "The work of the Lord" covers a wide range of spiritual activity, but it is all to subserve what is priestly, If this were generally understood what an entirely different and more exalted character would service assume! All who in any way take the place of Levites should consider it well.

"The charge of the sanctuary and the charge of the altar" (verse 5) can then be kept in a way that is suitable to God, so that wrath does not come upon His people. "But thou and thy sons with thee shall attend to your priesthood for all that concerneth the altar, and for that which is inside the veil; and ye shall perform the service. I give you your priesthood as a service of gift, and the stranger that cometh near shall be put to death" (verse 7). The priestly service, as contemplated here, falls into two divisions: "all that concerneth the altar", and "that which is inside the veil". The offering of gifts and sacrifices has its anti-type in the "spiritual sacrifices" which are offered by the holy priesthood today (1 Peter 2:5). Providing gifts, and bringing them, is the privilege and responsibility of the saints viewed as the people of God, but all offering at the altar is priestly work. In the application of this to ourselves we must remember that we have to take up both sides of the service. Everything of "all the hallowed things of the children of Israel" (verse 8) that was offered at the altar came under the charge of Aaron and his sons. It is not supposed that any lover of God will approach Him without an offering, for there is the repeated injunction, "None shall appear in my presence empty". We have seen, in considering the book of Leviticus, that the offerings all speak of Christ as known and possessed in affection by the people of God so that they are able and willing-hearted to bring Him to God for His pleasure and glory. The service of God in His house today largely "concerneth the altar". Much of Christ has been given into the hearts of the saints by the grace and work of God. And it has been given that it may become the material for "spiritual sacrifices". Offerings are brought out of the wealth bestowed in grace upon the Israel of God, but offering is at the altar, and is priestly work. It is a service sustained in virtue of the ever-living priesthood of Christ. For we must link this chapter with the one that precedes it, and remember that all the living service of the house of God derives character and power from what is true in Christ, so that it becomes the evidence that He is the living One.

Then the priesthood attends also to "that which is inside the veil". The veil here probably refers to the "curtain for the entrance of the tent", which would be the first veil in contrast with "the second veil" mentioned in Hebrews 9:3. The priesthood of Aaron and his sons as exercised "inside the veil" would include dressing the lamps of the candlestick daily and lighting them, burning fragrant incense on the golden altar every morning and evening, and setting the twelve cakes of shewbread before Jehovah every sabbath day. For remarks bearing on this service in detail the reader is referred to "An Outline of Exodus", chapters 25 and 30, and "An Outline of Leviticus", chapter 24.

"The way of the holy of holies" was not made manifest then; none entered the holiest save "the high priest only, once a year, not without blood". But now it

can be said, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entering into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and having, a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19 - 22). I advert to this because I believe that priestly service in the sanctuary, as taken up at the present time, derives its character from the fact that the consecrated priesthood has boldness for entering into the holy of holies. What answers, anti-typically, to the service in the holy place is taken up now in the light of approach to the holiest. So that this is not only a privilege accorded in grace, but it is essential to the intelligent service of God. "The blood of Jesus" obviously refers to the blood of the sin-offering which the high priest took in on the day of atonement, and sprinkled upon and before the mercy-seat. The blood of the bullock was for Aaron and his house, setting forth typically that Christ would by His own blood enter in once for all into the holy of holies, but that He would enter in that His "house" might enter in also. By entering in on sacrificial ground He has dedicated a new and living way *for us*.

While as yet the first tabernacle had its standing, and, indeed, even so long as Christ was here in flesh, the purpose of God's love was, so to speak, hidden behind the veil. Christ had to die that He might enter into the holiest in a condition which was in accord with what was in God's purpose for man. He is now the true Aaron, the Head of the priestly house, in a new and heavenly condition. As the Sin-offering He bore vicariously the judgment due to sin, the flesh, and everything that was old and imperfect, and His blood before the mercy-seat and on it is the eternal witness that divine holiness and majesty have been vindicated in the fullest way about the sin and uncleanness of man. There could never be a stain in the holy of holies, but there is the witness there that every stain has been removed, and God's glory enhanced by the way it has been removed. And now Jesus has gone from the cross and the grave to the holy of holies that a new and living way might be dedicated by Him for us. It is, of course, a way to be trodden spiritually. The holy of holies is a spiritual conception connected with "the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hand; that is, not of this creation" (Hebrews 9:11). It is the most holy part of "the true tabernacle, which the Lord has pitched, and not man" (Hebrews 8:2).

And now Christ as the true Aaron is "a great priest over the house of God" (Hebrews 10:21). The purpose and calling of God are set forth in Him as Man before God, and He is Priest to bring the influence of it to bear on the whole house of God, to make the thoughts of divine love dominant there. God has

great thoughts in regard of His saints as the many sons whom He is bringing to glory, for they are sanctified and all of one with the Sanctifier; they are Christ's brethren, and have boldness for entering where He has entered, even the holy of holies. If we approach now, we approach to where every divine thought regarding us is held for us by a great Priest. Who knows God as He does? Who knows the holy of holies as He does? Who understands the service of God as He understands it? How wonderful to have such a Priest there, attracting us to where He is! The Ark of the covenant and the Mercy-seat are there, but there is also a great Priest whom we can appropriate as One who has full intelligence of all that in which God would be known and served. *His* lips, indeed, do keep knowledge (Malachi 2:7). We shall only get a due appreciation of what is set forth in the Ark of the covenant and the Mercy-seat as we come under the great Priest.

The holy of holies is not a place for activity, but for the contemplation of God as known in the light of Christ as the Ark of the covenant and the Mercy-seat. The thought of contemplating in the house of God or the sanctuary appears again and again in Scripture. For example, we read, "One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, to behold the beauty (or graciousness) of Jehovah, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). Again we read, "My soul thirsteth for thee ... to see thy power and thy glory, as I have beheld thee in the sanctuary"

(Psalm 63:1,2). Then again, "They have seen thy goings, O God, the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary" (Psalm 68:24). If such thoughts were suggested by the prophetic Spirit, we may be sure that they take a very exalted and intensified meaning now that Christ has entered into the holy of holies. There is great blessedness in approaching God to see His power and glory, and His goings, and these are beheld in a wondrous way in the holiest. Such contemplation, in the company of Christ as the great Priest, gives intelligence of the mind and glory of God, and this qualifies those who approach to come into the assembly with priestly ability to carry on the service of God for His pleasure. We cannot please Him better than to approach, in suitable moral conditions, to behold all that in which He is pleased to be known. Such approach will have a transforming effect, displacing human thoughts, and bringing the holy priesthood in heart and mind into correspondence with the great thoughts of divine love, so that the service of God in the assembly can be intelligently taken up. The service connected typically with the holy place is now rendered by those who can bring into it the value of what is known in the holiest. To what a high spiritual level this brings all priestly service!

"I give you your priesthood as a service of gift" is a word ever to be borne in mind. Exalted and dignified as the priesthood is, involving sonship and being brethren of Christ, it is "a service of gift". It is purely, and in every way, the fruit of divine grace. It pleases God to give it to those whom He has called with a holy calling, and this alone accounts for the fact that there is a priesthood now in blessed association with the living, glorious Priest in heaven, composed of those who live because He lives. Anyone who assumed to come near on any other ground is a "stranger" who comes in some fleshly way, and such will surely be "put to death".

The priestly service Godward as "concerneth the altar" is not spoken of here in detail; for that we must go to Leviticus. The offerings are seen in this chapter as given to the priesthood to be their food. Jehovah says to Aaron of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel, "To thee have I given them, because of the anointing, and to thy sons by an everlasting statute", and also that what is given is by "an everlasting covenant of salt before Jehovah" (verse 19); this indicates the perpetuity of this wonderful provision for the sustenance of priestly life. Aaron and his sons had been anointed many years before this, but it is precious to see that, notwithstanding many sad things that had intervened, Jehovah regards the anointing as having all its original value. The gifts of this chapter are all "because of the anointing". Jehovah would remind Aaron and his sons, as the end of the wilderness drew near, that their priesthood was in virtue of the anointing, and that it retained before Him the same blessed character that it had at the beginning. Something precisely analogous to this has taken place in the history of the assembly. Saints were anointed at the beginning, for it is written, "He that ... has anointed us is God" (2 Corinthians 1:21), and the body of Christ is referred to as "the Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12), that is, as anointed. Whatever was holy and priestly in apostolic times was in the power and grace of the anointing. But many sad things have come in since then, and even true believers have largely got away from that spiritual state which goes along with the anointing. Even the truth of being anointed is very little known in a practical sense. But during the last century a most gracious revival has been going on, and one of its most marked features has been the attention which God has called to the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is evident that if place is given to the Spirit as the anointing it is the same anointing as was known in power at the beginning of the dispensation. There is not another Holy Spirit, and whatever priestly conditions were brought about as the anointing was in power at the beginning will be brought about as saints recognise the anointing now, and are exercised to be in suitability to it. The anointing, as taken account of by God, is exactly the same today as it was at the beginning, notwithstanding all the corrupting

influences that have been active in the Christian profession, It is for us to recognise as a great spiritual reality that it is the anointing which puts us on a priestly footing with God.

This chapter makes very clear that the food of the priesthood is derived from the offerings of the people. "Every offering of theirs, of all their oblations, and of all their sin-offerings, and of all their trespass-offerings, which they render unto me, it is most holy for thee and for thy sons" (verse 9). We are familiar with the thought of spiritual food in the form of milk for babes and solid food for full-grown men; we read also of the measure of corn in season being given to the Lord's household, and of His sheep and lambs being fed. But all that is from the divine side — grace taking account of the need, and supplying it according to the divine bounty. But the food of the priests, as seen in this chapter, does not come from that side, but from the offerings of the people. It is derived from what goes from the people Godward. It is reserved from a spiritual wealth that goes out to God from the enriched hearts of His people, or that is the expression of their moral exercises in sin and trespass-offerings. It is not the down-flow from God — though that is surely the first producing cause of it all — but the up-flow of offering Godward that results in His priests being well-nourished. He is pleased to assign to His priests a goodly part in what is rendered to Him by His people. It is an important and helpful instruction, for it indicates that priestly vigour will only be maintained as the people of God are so affectionately in the bond of the covenant that they bring offerings to Him.

We may conclude that the priesthood was very poorly nourished in the wilderness, for Jehovah asked long afterwards, "Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and oblations in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of your Moloch, and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye had made to yourselves" (Amos 5:25, 26). What an awful thing that He should have had to say, "your Moloch", "*your* images", "*your* god", as though they had given Him up altogether! It is evident that the general state was such that offerings were not brought. In such conditions there would be little food for the priesthood. How prophetic is this of a prolonged period when what was idolatrous prevailed in the Christian profession! Not that it submerged everything, for God had those who loved Him even at such a time. We may depend upon it that Moses and Joshua and Caleb, and probably many others, were a reserved remnant for Jehovah who took no part in the worship of Moloch or Chiun, and there were such in the darkest period of church history. But as to the public history of the Christian profession there was a long time without very much to sustain or invigorate priestly conditions.

But the chapters now before us, referring to the very time when such sorrowful neglect of Jehovah was general amongst His people, show that He did not give up His own thoughts, and that He had before Him to secure from His people what His heart desired, and that in securing it He would provide food for the priestly house. It is a beautiful intimation of what God would bring to pass as the end of His ways in the pure sovereignty of His mercy and love. And it is a lovely picture of what He is working out today after all the failure that has come in, and, we might say, in spite of it all. It is good to get to God's side of things, and these chapters bring us there.

Our attention has been called in chapter 17 to Christ as the living Priest, having a spiritual house and tribe associated with Him. And now in chapter 18 an Israel of God comes into view, bringing offerings and oblations, and the firstfruits of the land, and the tithes of its produce. Notwithstanding the utter breakdown of the flesh in responsibility, which has been as fully seen in the Christian profession as it was seen in Israel, God has before Him to secure by His gracious working that there shall be an answer to what is in His mind, and He brings it into view as the end of the wilderness approaches. This is going on today in the mighty power and grace of God. He is bringing His people to know His covenant love, as witnessed in the death of Christ, with the result that they are so enriched, and their hearts so moved in appreciation of Christ, that they bring copious and varied offerings. And this becomes the means of nourishing a holy priesthood. As the saints are liberated by being brought into the good of the covenant, and as they are enriched in Christ, there is increasing capacity and willingness to bring offerings of praise. And this is not only acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, but it ministers to the strength and gladness of all that is priestly.

The offerings as given to the priests are spoken of as "most holy", and they are to be eaten in this character (verse 10). They do not represent mere utterances, but they typify what is brought as spiritual substance in the affections of the saints, and voiced by the Holy Spirit. No fleshly, or even merely natural, element has place in such offering. The substance of it is of Christ, and it is brought by the true circumcision "who worship by the Spirit of God" (Philippians 3:3). It is thus "most holy". What exercise there should be with us that the "spiritual sacrifices" in the assembly should truly have this character. Much more is needed than correctness in expression. There must be spiritual substance in the affections, for without it there will be nothing really for God, nor will there be anything to support living priestly conditions. All this would teach us that any lack of priestly vigour could be traced to lack of spiritual offerings, and the absence of these would indicate that the people of God have not had their hearts much directed into the love of God.

It will be noticed that "heave-offerings" are specially mentioned, suggesting energy in offering. Then of the oil, the new wine and the wheat it is "the best" or "the fat", and "the firstfruits", "the first ripe", that are to be given. The very choicest products of divine grace and of spiritual industry are essential to the nourishment of what is priestly. The acceptability of such offerings to *God* is not what is spoken of here. The teaching is that it is by such excellent things that a living priesthood is sustained in vigour. Both sides of the type have to be taken up by us. As *the people of God* there has to be spiritual wealth, and willingness to bring the offerings. Then as *the priestly family* the offerings become ours by divine gift, to be eaten in a holy way for the strengthening of priestly constitution.

The offerings of verse 9 are for the males of the priestly house; those of verses 11 - 13 are for daughters also, though only for those that are "clean". The males represent those who, as in the power of the anointing, are competent to appropriate and assimilate the "most holy" things. But the heave-offering and wave-offering of verses 11 - 13 represent a wider range of things; they are "holy things" (verse 19), but are not ranked amongst the "most holy". And these are given to be the portion of daughters also. This type shows that saints may be viewed as of divine generation, members of the priestly family, and partakers of privilege in regard of food and constitution, without being regarded as exercising priestly functions. The "daughters" of Aaron represent those who can take up things family-wise, as identified affectionately with priestly interests and service, though not actually functioning as priests themselves. They are introduced here to show how grace extends the privilege of receiving priestly food to the whole priestly household. Probably many believers feel that they do not know much of the power of the anointing, or of the priestly competency which attaches to "sons". But if we are conscious that our affections and desires are linked up with what is priestly, and that we have part in the interests connected with the holy service of God, we can come in as "daughters", and have a full share in the holy things which are assigned to us as food by divine gift. The "sons" are the most privileged, for they may eat of the "most holy" things, but it is better to be a "daughter" and as such eat of the "holy things", than to be altogether outside the priestly family. Speaking practically, it is to be feared that many believers have hardly known what it is to be "daughters" in the house of the true Aaron, much less "sons".

Then "Every devoted thing in Israel shall be thine" (verse 14). Every movement of heart-devotion contributes to the strength of what is priestly. We have all something which can be devoted, if our affections move Godward in response to His love, and one feels persuaded that we should be stimulated to

much more devotedness if we realised what a gain it would bring to the priestly service of God.

The firstborn "of men or of beasts" (verse 16) could not be offered in sacrifice, for both were unclean. No doubt there is instruction in the firstborn "of men or of beasts" being classed together, for man as having come under sin and death is no better morally than an unclean beast. But Jehovah had redemption rights over both, and whatever He was entitled to, in virtue of those rights, He transferred in its full value to the priest. But, inasmuch as they could not be offered in sacrifice, they had to be ransomed. Ransom in this connection meaning that their full value "after the shekel of the sanctuary" was to go to the priest. God thus showing that from the outset of His ways in grace He had in mind that they should all contribute to the priestly element amongst His people. We are accustomed to think of God claiming the firstborn as if He took him, so to speak, directly for Himself. But this chapter teaches us that He takes him by way of giving him to the priest. God would have the youngest convert to have a sense that he is intended to benefit and support the priestly service which at the present time ministers to God's pleasure and glory. His full value is to go to support that.

"But the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat, thou shalt not redeem: they are holy" (verse 17). *They* are typical of Christ, and are to take their place along with the other holy offerings which furnish food for the priesthood. And all that is thus given to the priestly family is "by an everlasting statute. It shall be an everlasting covenant of salt before Jehovah unto thee and thy seed with thee" (verse 19). The faithfulness of God is pledged in the fullest way to secure that what is offered to Him shall be the portion of His priests. What a comfort to true lovers of God it is to be assured of this! Every spiritual sacrifice that is offered at His altar becomes food for the holy priesthood. It is by His grace and peculiar mercy that some of His people have been brought back in these last days from Babylonish captivity, and the altar has been rebuilt as in Zerubbabel's time (Ezra 3:2). And, though things are in a remnant condition, offerings *are* being brought, and there is food available for the priestly family. Our great concern should be to be nourished by the food which the faithfulness, of God has secured to us, so that priestly conditions and service may be maintained in a living and vigorous way for the pleasure of God. God Himself thus becomes the portion and inheritance of His, priests (verse 20).

Then "all the tithes in Israel" become the inheritance of "the children of Levi" (verses 21 - 24). We have noticed that the staff of Aaron was "for the house of Levi" (chapter 17:8). All levitical service is to take character from Christ as the

living Priest chosen of God, and it is all to be united to what is priestly, and to minister to what is priestly. What an elevated and spiritual thought this gives us of levitical service! Its *object* is not the good of man, though it will undoubtedly secure that, but that GOD may be served in relation to the tent of meeting. So the tithes, which are God's due from all His people, are given to the Levites as their inheritance.

The order is divinely beautiful. The people prosper spiritually as cultivating the land given to them by God, and they gladly render to Him what is due "as a heave-offering". Their affections move energetically Godward in rendering the tithes, and these are given to the Levites for their service in the tent of meeting. All that is levitical derives strength from what is rendered to God by His people. So that, if levitical service is lacking in competency and vigour, it raises a question as to whether we are bringing the tithes?

The tithes support the Levites, then the Levites minister to the priests, and the priestly and spiritual service of God goes on according to the due order. It is instructive to see that it all works upward.

In keeping with this we see in the last section of the chapter that the Levites have to offer a heave-offering of what they receive — "the tenth of the tithe". They are to "heave the best thereof", and "give thereof Jehovah's heave-offering to Aaron the priest" (verses 28,29). The Levite not only helps the priest in the direct service of the tent of meeting, but he contributes support to him in the way of food. It shows plainly that every movement towards God benefits what is priestly. All service has to yield its tithe to the priest; otherwise it may bring sin, and lead to the profanation of the holy things (verse 32). There, is perhaps more danger of this than we are aware.

The whole chapter is most instructive and encouraging, as showing how divine service is to be carried on and supported, notwithstanding the great outward failure which has taken place. God does not give up His thoughts; He rather gives them increased prominence when failure has come in. It is in this connection that His mind is given us in this chapter. We do not see here the original taking up of what is priestly and levitical, but how God speaks of it at a time long after its first institution, when the general state of things amongst His professed people has become manifestly deplorable. It is thus of peculiar importance at the present time.

NUMBERS 19

Numbers 19

The type of Christ which comes before us in this chapter was not mentioned amongst the offerings of which Jehovah spoke to Moses out of the tent of meeting when the service was first instituted. It comes in towards the end of the forty years in the wilderness, after all the terrible break down recorded in chapters 11 - 16, and is thus typical and prophetic of a provision of grace which is available for us now after all the church failure has manifested itself. The "water of purification from sin" was there from the beginning (see chapter 8:7), but in the wisdom of God the red heifer only appears in this part of the book of Numbers, intimating that it is a provision which has specially in view God's ways with His people as the time of testimony in the wilderness is nearing its end.

If we consider how the flesh has manifested itself, as recorded in chapters 11 - 16, we shall understand that it is a moral necessity that the true Israel of God should be purified from its uncleanness. It was flesh that desired human or natural guidance when divine guidance was being clearly given. It was flesh that murmured and lusted, and that preferred Egypt's food to the manna from heaven, and wanted its own tastes gratified. It was flesh that spoke against Moses, and assumed to have God's mind as much as he had. It was flesh that was unbelieving as to the land of promise, and would have made a captain to go back to Egypt. It was flesh that was minded to rebel against both divine authority and grace, while professing to be zealous for the holiness of the assembly, and that sought priesthood for its own exaltation. And all this is, typically, flesh as manifesting itself amongst those who profess to know God. It was the dead bodies and bones of such persons which, if touched, rendered unclean. What a multitude of such bodies and bones there must have been. Scripture tells us of those with whom God was not pleased, that "they were strewn in the desert" (1 Corinthians 10:5). Probably they often died at the rate of a thousand per week. "Now all these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). *Whose* flesh is it of which God says, "the mind of the flesh is death"? It is *my* flesh; it is I as a member of Adam's race. None of us can say that we have never come into moral contact with what Paul speaks of as "this body of death" (Romans 7:24). The things which came out in Israel have come out in a more extended scale in the Christian profession, and they are all to be found in our own flesh, and they render purification absolutely necessary. God must have His people purified from the uncleanness of sinful flesh, and His grace provides a means of purification.

We must remember that we stand in relation to the tabernacle and the sanctuary of Jehovah, so that uncleanness is a very serious matter. It is not only that it defiles us personally, but if we neglect to purify ourselves we defile the tabernacle and the sanctuary (verses 13,20). God has been pleased to revive amongst His people the truth of His house, and the priestly service that pertains to it, and this renders uncleanness a more serious matter, in one sense, than it was before. The nearer we come to God the more imperative is it that we should partake of His holiness. There can be no doubt that God has raised the question of purification very definitely amongst His people in these last days. It is most practically important that the means of purifying should be at hand, that we should know what they are, and how to use them. In wondrous grace God has provided efficient means of purifying.

"And Jehovah spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, This is the statute of the law which Jehovah hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without blemish, wherein is no defect, and upon which never came yoke" (verses 1,2). It has often been remarked that the female in types has reference to *state*, and it is appropriate that such a type should have place here, for the uncleanness which necessitates purification is that contracted by touching "a dead person, or the bone of a man, or a grave". These things typify the state of man in the flesh as under sin and death. If I allow a fleshly motive or feeling to work in my heart I have touched a dead body or a bone; I have come into contact with a state which is morally one of death. For we read that "the mind of the flesh is death ... the mind of the flesh is enmity against God ... they that are in flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6 - 8).

But, with a view to purifying, God calls our attention to the perfection of Christ. There is a particularity in the description of the red heifer which is not, as far as I remember, found in connection with any other offering. It was generally requisite in the offerings that they should be "without blemish", but in the case of the red heifer it is added, "wherein is no defect, and upon which never came yoke". God's blessed anointed Man was, indeed, "without blemish". Pilate said, "I find no guilt in this man"; the thief said, "this man has done nothing amiss"; He said Himself, "Which of you convinces me of sin?" And the Holy Spirit has testified through Peter that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth"; He has borne witness through John that in Him "sin is not", and through Paul that He "knew no sin".

But "wherein is no defect" is more than being without blemish. Every feature of positive good, every moral excellence, was there in the highest development. If any good had been lacking it would have been a "defect", but

there was *everything* in Christ in which God could find delight. The more we study Christ the more we wonder at the contrast between Him and the man after the flesh. He never came under any yoke. The principles or customs of the world never controlled, or influenced, Him in the slightest degree. He never moved a step to please men, or as influenced by the fear of men. He was not affected either by flatteries or threats. He would not accept a crown from men, nor all the kingdoms of the world from Satan. And in the circle which was nearest to Him, neither the hopes nor the fears of His disciples, nor the well-meant suggestions of His mother, had any effect in determining His course. How soon are we brought under influences which bring us into servitude! But never yoke came upon Him. The Spirit of God would detain our hearts in the consideration of His perfection, and it is seen here as essential to His fitness to bear in grace the judgment that was due to the man under death.

While the contents of this chapter are spoken by Jehovah "to Moses and to Aaron", it is to be noted that Aaron does not appear as doing anything in connection with the red heifer. It is "Eleazar the priest" who has to do with it, and his becoming "unclean until the even" (verse 7) suggests that he is not to be viewed here as a type of Christ, but rather of a priestly condition in the saints as divinely helped (his name means, God is helper), by which they understand what is needful to meet defilements which are likely to occur in the wilderness. It is only by the Spirit of Christ being in the saints that they can enter with priestly intelligence into this holy matter. Eleazar does not slaughter the heifer, or burn it, but these actions take place "before him", "before his eyes" (verses 3,5). Priestly exercises in the saints lead to definite understanding of the great necessity for the death and judgment-bearing of Christ, not regarded here as in view of justification or reconciliation, but for purification from uncleanness.

We may remark that three distinct kinds of exercise are brought before us in this chapter. Priestly exercises are set forth in Eleazar. Then the service and exercises of clean men in connection with gathering the ashes of the heifer, and sprinkling the water of separation. Then the unclean person has exercises of his own. If we consider these things carefully they will help us to understand a great and important subject. The priest is seen, typically, as occupied with Christ, His death and judgment-bearing, and is profoundly affected by what he learns in Christ, and by His cross and death. The clean men, it seems to me, have to do with the matter from the standpoint of persons who may need purifying themselves some day, and who can thus enter feelingly into the provision that is made, and can serve their unclean brother without being too far from him to help him. And, finally, the unclean

person has his own exercises in the fear of God. But we will look at these things a little more in detail.

"And ye shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and he shall bring it outside the camp, and one shall slaughter it before him". It will be remembered that the bullock of the sin-offering for the priest that is anointed, and for the whole assembly (Leviticus 4) were burned "outside the camp", as were also the bullock and the goat on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16). But it is only, I believe, in the case of the red heifer that the bringing of the sin-offering outside the camp is said to be done by the priest. Leviticus 4:12,21 should probably read "shall one carry forth". I understand this to convey that the priest, as seen here, moves in priestly intelligence with God, as apprehending the deep essentiality, according to divine holiness, of Christ being made sin for us, and that this involved His being vicariously the forsaken One upon the cross. He "suffered without the gate" is a touching reference to the outside place in which He suffered as the Sin-offering, but the very scripture which speaks of this intimates that His saints are to be so affected by the thought of this that *they* move into the outside place as bearing His reproach. God has made Him to be sin for us, and a priestly state in us, as helped of God, would lead to our seeing how it behoved Him, how necessary it was, that He should suffer for sin in the outside place. He had to go outside all that allows that man in the flesh has some place with God, for it was of necessity that He should come under consuming judgment as due to man after that order. Jehovah has made "his soul an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10), and His priests are in their minds in accord with what Jehovah has done. In this sense they bring the heifer outside the camp, as recognising that on no other ground could there be purification for sin.

Eleazar is a spectator in regard to the slaughter of the heifer and the burning of it. He typifies one who contemplates with priestly vision the death and judgment-bearing of Christ as the way of God's dealing with sin in the flesh. He contemplates it with affectionate reverence, and his actions indicate that he has understood its import and value. "And Eleazar the priest shall take of its blood with his finger, and shall sprinkle of its blood directly before the tent of meeting seven times" (verse 4). It is figurative of faith's apprehension that the only ground on which God's people can go on with Him is the death and blood-shedding of Christ. All the saints, thank God! know something of the value and efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son; they are assured that it "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). But it is most important for us to understand that the shedding of blood means that the life of the flesh has been poured out (see Leviticus 17:11). In the case of Christ this was vicarious, and for us, and it signifies plainly that our life as in the flesh has come to an

end in His death, and therefore can have no place at all in reference to our approach to God. If we approach, it must be on other ground altogether; it must be as in the value of Christ and of His death. The priest taking of the heifer's blood with his finger, and sprinkling it seven times before the tent of meeting, indicates, typically, a personal apprehension of this in a very complete way.

"And one shall burn the heifer before his eyes; its skin and its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall he burn" (verse 5). No part of this offering is burned on the altar; it is unique in this respect, and also in the fact that even its blood was burned. It is an offering which, more than any other, emphasises the thought of the unmitigated judgment under which Christ came when He was made sin for us. He identified Himself upon the cross, and was identified by God, with that state of sinful flesh in which we were by nature, and He came under its condemnation in the fullest way. Wrath without relief was His portion. How solemn is the contemplation of this! What can I think of the flesh if I see it condemned thus in the Person and sacrifice of my Saviour and Redeemer? The moral effect of such a contemplation is seen in the action of the priest which immediately follows the burning of the heifer "before his eyes".

"And the priest shall take cedar-wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the burning of the heifer" (verse 6). He takes these things, which are figurative of all that in which a man would naturally pride himself, and casts them into the burning. The cedars are "high and lifted up"; see Isaiah 2:12 - 17. The hyssop reminds us that there is such a thing as man "doing his own will in humility".

That is, there may be an outward appearance of humility, and the language of self-depreciation may be used when, after all, one may be "vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh" (see Colossians 2:18). Then the scarlet represents anything in man which is distinctive so as to be a glory to him. I have no doubt every human being has something which is a bit of "scarlet" to him. But contemplation of the burning of the heifer leads to the priest casting these things into the midst of the burning. It is not here that *God* puts them there; He did that at the cross; but here the *priest* puts them there. The spiritually-minded believer, as contemplating the judgment-bearing of Christ, casts everything of the flesh into the burning. Whether it be high flesh or low flesh, or whatever it may have which gives it distinction, in the light of the cross of Christ it must go into the burning. God helps the priest to put it all there, not only without regret, but with great relief (read Philippians 3:3 - 11).

"And the priest shall wash his garments, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterwards he shall come into the camp; and the priest shall be unclean until the even" (verse 7). A good deal of exercise follows the contemplation, in a priestly way, of Christ as bearing the condemnation of sinful flesh, even though there may not have been any act of sin on the part of the believer who thus contemplates Him. So that a certain purifying goes on even in one who has not touched a dead body. The washing and bathing of the priest indicate that God would give even spiritual persons the consciousness of what is in their own flesh, necessitating a cleansing process, even though there has been no outward defilement. We cannot contemplate the sufferings of Christ for sin without having the sense in our souls that He suffered as bearing the condemnation of the sin that we have in our own flesh. We feel the need of maintaining moral separation from what is in us by nature, and the washing and bathing set this forth in type.

The priest being "unclean until the even" has reference, I believe, to a certain period of exercise during which one learns the uncleanness of one's own flesh, not by actual failure, but in the light of what Christ suffered in bearing its condemnation. The same kind of exercise is gone through by the "clean man" who gathers the ashes of the heifer, and deposits them outside the camp in a clean place (verse 8). The provision is "for the assembly of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin" (verse 9), but the man who gathers the ashes that they may be available for the purifying of others has to realise that there is that in himself which renders cleansing necessary. The most eminent saint, the greatest and most devoted servant, has to go through this exercise. It belongs to any day in the soul's history in which the judgment-bearing of Christ is apprehended. It is perhaps a deeper exercise, as being in a more spiritual person, than that of the one who is unclean by some allowance of the flesh. The "priest" and the "clean man" represent persons who have not allowed the flesh to act, but who have, nevertheless, to learn through what Christ suffered the uncleanness of their own flesh. They have to go through the deepest part of the exercises connected with purification, though not themselves unclean by touching a dead body or a bone. They touch what Christ suffered in bearing the judgment of sin, and in so doing they learn with God the very root of uncleanness in their own flesh. Such an exercise as this fits one to take up the service of which the Apostle speaks in Galatians 6:1 "Brethren, if even a man be taken in some fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted".

The one who touches "any dead body of a man shall be unclean seven days" (verse 11). This typifies a believer who has sinned by allowing some working

of the flesh, and the period of seven days indicates that, in such a case, purification can only be brought about by a moral process which takes time. I do not mean that we are to take the "seven days" literally, but they evidently represent a completed exercise, whether the actual time be long or short. And it is to be noted that responsibility to use the means of purifying rests, in the first place, on the unclean person. "He shall purify himself ... whoever ... purifieth not himself" (verses 12,13). This agrees with New Testament scriptures well known to us. "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God's fear" (2 Corinthians 7:1). "And every one who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Sometimes those who have sinned seem to think that it is for others to move in the matter of their restoration, but it is clearly their responsibility to make known that they are conscious of being unclean, and that they need purifying. There is a great lack of moral sensibility in any person who does not feel that he should make this known. The offender at Corinth had evidently manifested repentance before the Apostle exhorted the saints to show grace to him, and assure him of their love. It is not until "the third day" in this type that anything is suggested as being done by another, but others are observant of the unclean man's exercises, and are ready to serve him when "the third day" comes. What is suggested here is that when one becomes conscious of having allowed the flesh, exercise as to it begins at once. The days begin to be counted, but, according to the type, there are two days during which nothing can be done in the way of purifying. There is just the sad experience of being unclean, and unsuitable to enjoy the privileges of the congregation of God. But on the third day a clean man can help him by sprinkling "the water of separation" upon him. He has to be dependent on the service of "a clean man" for his purifying, but he himself is held responsible to have it done. He must "purify himself", however true it may be that it cannot be done without the brethren.

"The third day" there is relief for the conscience, for the unclean person has applied to him the solemn and yet blessed witness that Christ bore the judgment of that very flesh which he has allowed. But this in no wise leads him to think lightly of what has happened. On the contrary, it intensifies the self-aborrence which he feels when he realises what it cost Christ to bear the judgment due to him. And the apprehension of this gives a new character to his exercises during the period from the third to the seventh day. He judges himself now according to grace, and not merely by the working of conscience, and he gets a deeper sense of the holiness of God which necessitated Christ being made sin for him. The perfecting of this exercise has the result that "on the seventh day he shall be clean". He can now take up again in spiritual

liberty, and with a good conscience, his relations with the tabernacle and the sanctuary.

"This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: every one that cometh into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days" (verse 14). This scripture shows that sin working in the flesh may extend defiling influence even through the place which one has as dwelling amongst the people of God. It is as having regard to this that Paul says, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake up righteously, and sin not; for some are ignorant of God: I speak to you as a matter of shame" (1 Corinthians 15:33,34). He would have the saints to be careful as to their communications with those, even amongst themselves, who were marked by the mind of the flesh. And in this case it is to be noticed that one may become unclean without personal contact with the dead body. The "tent" where such a body is, or has been, teaches us that defilement, as estimated according to the holiness of God, often extends its influence to what is in proximity to it. It shows how subtly and insidiously evil influences operate, and this is in keeping with the repeated word, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6).

Normally the voice of triumph and salvation would be in the tents of the righteous (Psalm 118:15), and such tents are "goodly" (Numbers 24:5). But if the mind of the flesh is in evidence there, it is death, and the tent, instead of being "goodly", is, for the time, a sphere of defilement. One's house, or one's place amongst the brethren, if not held in the Spirit, may become injurious to the people of God. But God assumes that such conditions will not continue beyond "seven days", He assumes that in His congregation the provision for purifying will be known and used without delay. If it is not used most serious consequences ensue. "And the man that is unclean, and doth not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the congregation, for he hath defiled the sanctuary of Jehovah: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled on him: he is unclean" (verse 20).

The principle of verse 15 is of very wide application: "And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, shall be unclean". We are constantly in proximity to sources of uncleanness, so that it is of vital importance that we should not be open to receive contamination. A man with a wireless set could hardly be considered a covered vessel, nor one who addicted himself to reading the literature of the world. We cannot be open vessels when defilement is about without suffering loss in our souls, and becoming unfit for the Master's use. But the whole drift of this chapter is to impress us with the fact that divine provision is made for purifying, and that God counts upon His

people being ready to use that provision. But uncleanness is a very serious matter, for if one is not purified "that soul shall be cut off from Israel". So that purifying is not optional; it is a divine necessity for all who stand in relation to the tabernacle and sanctuary of God. I trust we may have a deepened sense of this on our spirits.

"And they shall take for the unclean of the ashes of the purification-offering that hath been burned, and shall put running water thereon in a vessel" (verse 17). The remembrance of what Christ suffered for sin can only be brought home effectively to the soul of one who is unclean, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a comfort to know that the Spirit is available for this service of grace. He is grieved by any allowance of the flesh, but He is at the disposal of the saints for the service of purifying. It would appear from Scripture that the first movement when a believer has sinned is on the part of Christ. For it is written that "if any one sin, we have a patron (or advocate) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). He takes up the cause even of one who has become unclean, and His advocacy has the result of leading to exercise on the part of the one who has sinned. It is probable that the discipline of God often comes in, consequent on the advocacy of Christ, as a help to self-judgment. Then the brethren, as observant of divine movements, are ready to take up their part in the service of restoration, but not in any natural or human power. They find that the Holy Spirit is at hand to be used in the way set forth in this type. We learn from, this scripture that it is a definite part of the service of the Spirit to be available to the saints for the effective purifying of one who is unclean. So that the teaching of this type has a very important place in relation to any movements of the brethren which have restoration in view. They need to have very definitely before them what Christ has suffered for sin, which would give their spirits a solemn and yet gracious outlook. And then they need to realise that all that is done to apply this for purifying must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to read this into such Scriptures as 2 Corinthians 2:6 - 8; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20; 1 John 5:16.

"And a clean man shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent, and upon all the utensils, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that hath touched the bone, or the one slain, or the dead person, or the grave; and the clean shall sprinkle it on the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day; and he shall purify him on the seventh day" (verses 18,19). This teaches us that the service of the brethren has an important and essential place in relation to purifying. The service of "a clean man" is necessary to sprinkle the water on the one who is unclean, God loves to do as much as possible of His work of grace mediately through His people. It

suggests plainly that the "clean man" has been observant of the state and exercises of his unclean brother. He knows the uncleanness, and how the exercise is progressing as to it; he knows when the third day has come, or the seventh day, and in a spirit of lowliness (typified by the hyssop) he can sprinkle the water. He can bring to bear in a timely way the witness of Christ's sufferings in the power of the Spirit, so that suitable exercises are brought to completion, and the unclean man is purified on the seventh day. All this sets forth a holy service of grace among the people of God which is brought into activity by that amongst them which has the character of sin. It is a wonderful lesson in grace, moving in perfect accord with divine holiness, to secure that which is in keeping with "the purification of the sanctuary". It is a service which is continually called for in the actual circumstances of the people of God, and it probably tests our spirituality as much as anything which we have to undertake. But it is a great loss if we shrink from taking it up when it is called for. Painful and sorrowful exercises and service cannot be avoided if the people of God are to be preserved in a state which will not defile the tabernacle or the sanctuary.

"And he shall wash his garments, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even" (verse 10). The purified person becomes active in his own moral exercises. His habits and ways and associations — typified by his garments — all come under a cleansing process, and he himself takes up the death of Christ for moral cleansing in a new way.

"And he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his garments, and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even" (verse 21). God gives us line upon line to show us that evil is a very serious thing, Purification from it is only possible through the unfathomable sufferings of Christ. And even the spiritual believer-whether as typified by the priest or the clean man-is made conscious in having to do with the sins of others that his own flesh is the same as theirs. He cannot serve one who has become unclean in the way of grace without going through a serious exercise as to this; he cannot say that *he* has no sin (1 John 1:8). I must not think that I can take any part in the restoration of another without going through humbling exercise as to myself. And the washing shows that something of a sanctifying and cleansing character goes on even in one who serves in love his brother who has sinned. Self-judgment, is deepened both in the priest and in the clean man, so that they partake more fully of "the purification of the sanctuary", as a result of being engaged in the purification of another. The exercises suggested typically as having place in the priest and the clean man are as important and instructive as the exercises of the one who has become unclean by touching a dead body or a bone.

NUMBERS 20

Numbers 20

The first incidents at Kadesh, in the fortieth year of the wilderness journey, were the death and burial of Miriam. She had a great place at the coming out of Egypt, for Jehovah sent before them "Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Micah 6:4). She celebrated Jehovah's triumph in a sweet refrain to the song of Moses, but, like many happy believers, she did not take up that part of the song which dwelt upon the purpose of God. It is rather sad to see her die, as it were, within sight of the land, but not getting into it. How often there is a spiritual deficiency at the beginning of our history, unnoticed at the time, which leaves its mark on us as long as we are here. Miriam had not even a distinguished mode of departure like her two brothers, who went up into mountains to die. "And the people abode at Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there" (verse 1). There is a warning in it. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you might seem to have failed of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

God's purpose for Israel was the land, and at this time the people were nearing it. So that it is a period in the history which corresponds with the time in which we now are. The period of assembly testimony in the wilderness is nearing its close. It is in view of this that during the last hundred years God has brought His purpose more clearly into the view of His saints than at any time since the days of the apostles. There has been much precious ministry of God's thoughts concerning His saints as "risen with Christ", and as made to "sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". The Lord has called attention in a marked way to eternal life as something to be known and enjoyed in a sphere of blessing which answers to "the land". It is not that, wilderness experiences and education cease. We shall see from much that follows in this book that they do not, for the character of the flesh came out after this in terrible ways. But the people had now come to a part of their history which had definitely in view their entering in.

But another Meribah (Contention) comes in at this point, occasioned by the fact that "there was no water for the assembly" (verse 2). It was a very testing time, for, in great part, what they said was true. "It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink" (verse 5). Neither the forty years behind them, during which they had "lacked nothing" (Deuteronomy 2:7), nor the prospect of the land before them, with all its wealth and fatness, sufficed to give them confidence at a time when Jehovah suffered them to be tested. But it is important to see that His object

in the testing at this time was not to expose their unbelief (though it did that incidentally), but to bring out before them and for our benefit, in a most striking way the value of the priesthood which He had set up on their behalf. That priesthood spoke of grace being in supremacy, for we are all familiar with how "the throne of grace" is associated with the great High Priest in Hebrews 4:14 - 16. Priesthood, in this aspect of it, supposes infirmities in those on whose behalf it is exercised. Our creature weakness makes us shrink from suffering, and if suffering is involved in God's way with us we are very liable to be discouraged, and to cast away our confidence. But there is One before God on our behalf at every moment when faith is tried, and when circumstances seem to be the reverse of favourable.

The very sight of "the staff" ought to have re-assured every fainting heart in Israel. How could it be supposed that Jehovah would let them die of hunger or thirst in an "evil place" if He had chosen to have a priest before Him on their behalf who was characterised, typically, by resurrection power? The very fact that there was such a priest was an extraordinary token that Jehovah's thoughts towards them were thoughts of infinite grace, and that He was bent on carrying out His purpose notwithstanding what might come out in them. But they did not think of this at the moment of testing. Have we not often been like them?

God used the circumstances of the moment to bring out that He was going on with them according to the grace of the priesthood which He had set up, even if they were not going on with Him in a sense of it. We may say reverently that He could not do otherwise than act in keeping with the resource in grace which He had placed amongst them in the priest whose staff had budded. It was a striking illustration of what Paul says, "if we are unfaithful he abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). So "Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Take the staff" (verses 7,8). It was the first thing in *His* mind, and the very unbelief of the people served the purpose of bringing to light its virtue and value before Him.

I have no doubt the divine thought was that the people should love the priest as the one who bore their names as a memorial before Jehovah. He would have had them to appropriate Aaron as their representative. God's called ones, the heirs of promise, are marked by the appropriation of Christ as Priest. Hence we read in Hebrews, "*Having* therefore a great high priest" (chapter 4:14); "*We have* such a one high priest" (chapter 8:1); "*Having* ... a great priest over the house of God" (chapter 10:21). These statements imply that He is known and possessed in the character of Priest: the link with Him is secure and firm; it is an anchor of the soul entering into that within the veil;

He is definitely held in faith and affection. If we love God we shall love the Priest, for He represents all that is in God's purpose for us, and He represents us as called according to purpose.

So that this incident, unlike some of those in a former part of the book, is not so much an uncovering of the evil heart of unbelief as it is an unveiling, typically, of the grace of which the priesthood of Christ is the blessed witness. It so transcends all human thoughts that we need hardly wonder that Moses and Aaron knew not how to rise to it. The people were contending; they were wishing they had died when their brethren died before Jehovah; they said that Moses and Aaron had brought them and their beasts into the wilderness to die! Moses and Aaron went from the congregation to the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces. It was a right attitude to take under the circumstances, and it led to the glory of Jehovah appearing to them. But neither of them was, at the moment, transformed into correspondence with the glory that appeared. It was not a glory that would consume, as on some past occasions, but the glory of Jehovah as One who was hallowing Himself in all the grace that the priesthood expressed, and which had the fulfilment of His own purpose in view.

"Take the staff, and gather the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, and it shall give its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock, and shalt give the assembly and their beasts drink" (verse 8). Should it not have sent a mighty thrill through the hearts of the two brothers? So potent was "the staff" — so marvellous the grace of which it was the token — that it had but to be brought, and the rock spoken to, and it would give its water! Moses was to have the high honour of being the personal representative of Jehovah in a glory that had not been known in the same way before! "*Thou* shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock, and shalt give the assembly and their beasts drink". It was most blessed instruction for Moses and Aaron, as it is for us, in the glory which shines forth in the grace of priesthood, and which will be favourable to God's people, notwithstanding all they are in themselves, because He has called them according to His purpose.

Moses had, on several occasions, become a priestly intercessor for the people. On those occasions he was a beautiful type of Christ, and a personal exemplification of the Spirit of Christ. But on this occasion, for our instruction, he was allowed to drop down from this high typical and personal level to express something of what he was dispensationally as the representative of the law. It was most needful, both for Israel and for ourselves, that it should appear that the law could not bring about the fulfilment of divine purpose. So

that in this incident it is "the staff", and "the rock", that are the types of Christ, and we are permitted to learn a good deal more of what was in the mind of God when the staff budded as we read in chapter 17.

Jehovah was hallowing Himself in a grace that rose above all that the people were. No smiting would be needed, no judicial dealing, as had been seen, in type, at the Meribah of the wilderness of Sin. It was but for one to *speak* who carried "the staff", and the rock would yield all that the need required. If we pray, "Father, thy name be hallowed!" (Luke 11:2), we need to understand how it is to be hallowed. Jehovah would have been hallowed by Moses speaking to the rock. All the children of Israel would have seen how wonderful was the grace that would give abundantly what they required, without even a word of reproach. It was but to *speak* in presence of "the staff", and the need of all would be satisfied! Jehovah had said so: it was simply a question of believing Him. To believe Him would be to hallow Him; it would bring into display the transcendent grace which was His glory at that time. How slow we are to take in the results in grace of Christ being before the face of God for His people! "Take the staff" was a word which should have dismissed from the minds of Moses and Aaron all thought of what the people were, and should have filled them with thoughts of the grace in which Jehovah had set up a priest on their behalf. This was the great thing, the vital matter of witness, the appropriate expression of divine glory, at that moment. Jehovah would magnify "the staff" and all that of which it was the token. To miss this was to miss all that really mattered. To be out of line with it was to be disqualified for bringing the people into the land which Jehovah had given them. All must be of grace that is really for divine glory, and grace would not be grace if it were measured by what God's people deserve.

Let us ponder "the staff"! The people of God, when tested, often speak the language of unbelief. But are God's thoughts towards them, and His ways with them, according to this, or are they according to the blessed fact that Christ is before Him as Priest on their behalf? Thank God! the latter is the case; would that we took in the greatness and reality of it! In regard of entering the land all must be of grace. See how grace shines in the epistle to the Ephesians! "The glory of his grace"; "the riches of his grace"; "ye are saved by grace"; "the surpassing riches of his grace"!

The Meribah of Numbers 20 was one of the most important places of divine instruction in the wilderness, for it brought out the principle on which alone the people could be brought into the land. We being what we are, nothing but pure grace according to purpose is of any avail. Moses, as representing the law, ready to smite, proved, at that moment, an untrue witness to the divine

glory, and was thereby disqualified to bring the congregation into the land. But this did not arrest the divine testimony. Jehovah became His own witness, and in spite of the unbelief of Moses — more serious, really, at this juncture than the unbelief of the people — “much water came out” (verse 11). Jehovah hallowed Himself if Moses and Aaron did not hallow Him. It was the people as subjects of grace and divine purpose who would go into the land, and only one who definitely understood this could bring them there. That is, they would not go in on the ground of what they were by nature, or in the flesh, whether well-behaved or badly behaved, but on the ground of pure grace, and as the subjects of a sovereign work of God. The thought comes now clearly before us of an Israel that stands in relation to a divinely constituted priest, and towards whom God acts as in that relation, and not according to what they are in themselves. It is really the thought of an elect people viewed according to a purpose and calling and grace which are set forth in Christ. Christ is Priest for those who are the subjects of divine calling, so that “the staff” before the testimony, coming in (chapter 17) after all the terrible break down, showed that God had in His mind an Israel which by His own calling would stand in relation to Christ as Priest. It is that Israel, and not Israel according to the flesh, that learns holiness and grace, and gets the victory over enemies, and finally possesses the inheritance.

From the first institution of the priesthood it had appeared as connected with God’s sovereign purpose and election, for the names on Aaron’s shoulder-pieces were engraven “in stone, as the engravings of a seal”, and “surrounded by enclosures of gold ... as stones of memorial for the children of Israel”. And it is written of the stones of the breast-plate that “enclosed in gold shall they be in their settings” and “engraved as a seal”. There is no thought suggested in this of names being there provisionally, or of any possibility of their being blotted out; they are there “for a memorial before Jehovah continually”. The priest was the representative before Him of His elect Israel — the Israel according to purpose, and not according to the flesh.

When Aaron’s staff budded, near the end of the wilderness, after all the breakdown of Israel according to the flesh, we may be sure that God’s original thought remained in His mind, with a specially added token that the priesthood of His choice would be exercised in the power of life in resurrection. It is typically Christ as a Priest in the power of indissoluble life, not for a people according to flesh, but for a people divinely called according to God’s purpose and grace. The calling is seen as secured first in the Priest, and then the election comes into it. To see this helps to make clear the line of teaching in this book. It will be seen how important is the word, “the man

whom I shall choose" (Numbers 17:5). The principle of election comes in as the source of what is living.

If we turn to the New Testament scriptures which speak of Christ as Priest we shall see that He holds that office in this connection. For example, in the epistle to the Romans it is after the saints have been spoken of as "called according to purpose", and as "God's elect", that Christ is spoken of as being "at the right hand of God; who also intercedes for us". It is said further, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? According as it is written, For thy sake we are put to death all the day long; we have been reckoned as sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we more than conquer through him that has loved us" (see Romans 8:28 - 36). The love of Christ here spoken of is undoubtedly His love as Priest.

In Hebrews Christ is High Priest for the "holy brethren, partakers of heavenly calling". They are "the heirs of the promise", to whom God was willing to show more abundantly "the unchangeableness of his purpose". And this is yet more evident when we consider that Christ became Priest "with the swearing of an oath". Nothing could show more plainly that He is constituted Priest in connection with divine purpose and is representative of those who are "called according to purpose". Nothing can invalidate this. The priesthood of Christ is for an elect people, who are regarded by God in the light of His own purpose. Moses was altogether out of line with this when he said, "Ye rebels". Indeed, Jehovah's word to Moses and Aaron was, "Ye rebelled against my commandment at the waters of Meribah" (verse 24). It might appear that what Moses said was the expression of righteous indignation, and that it was warranted by the circumstances, but it was really so contrary to the mind of God at the time that He regarded it as rebellion. God claims the right to view His people as His elect, and His saying, "Take the staff", was the indication that He was so viewing them at that moment. The flesh was there in the people, and it had unquestionably been in activity, but "Who shall bring an accusation against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is he that condemns? It is Christ who has died, but rather has been also raised up; who is also at the right hand of God; who also intercedes for us" (Romans 8:33,34). God will assuredly have His own way of dealing with the flesh when it acts in His people; He will discipline and purge them; but He will do so because they are the people of His election and calling, linked up with His chosen Priest.

Jehovah saying, "Take the staff", clearly indicated that He was regarding the people from the standpoint of what was connected with the priesthood. It

would have its answer in the apostle's enquiry, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The severe testing of the "evil place" answers to the tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword of Romans 8:35. Such things *do* bring out what we are, but they do not separate from the love of Christ. Moses and Aaron were to speak to the rock "*before their eyes*". The people were to see, and to be encouraged by, the confidence with which their spiritual leaders could count upon God's faithfulness to His own thoughts and purposes. There was to be, typically, the assurance that refreshing streams would flow forth from Christ, the blessed witness that no evils that can befall, no creature power in the universe, can separate God's elect from the love of Christ, or from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. God's purpose and calling make this for ever sure, and the priesthood of Christ is the pledge of it.

It we *speak* to the Rock it will answer. There is in Christ an abundant supply of spiritual refreshing by which the saints may be made superior to all that befalls in the "evil place". "In all these things we more than conquer through him that has loved us". The rock here is a "high rock"; it is typical of Christ exalted — who "has been also raised up; who is also at the right hand of God" — and as the One whose love yields such refreshing that we more than conquer in the "evil place". "The staff" entitles us to view ourselves, and the saints, in the light of divine purpose. As in that light we can speak to the Rock in the full certainty that we shall get what we need to make us superior to trying circumstances here. Being able to *speak* to the Rock indicates that we have an intelligent apprehension of what is in Christ as the One in whom God's purpose of love stands firm. When spoken to, that Rock gives its water. The blessedness of God's purpose is known anticipatively in the wilderness, and it becomes refreshment and satisfaction in the hearts of the saints.

Immediately following this we have the refusal of Edom "to give Israel passage through his territory". Whenever anything that is of God gets a spiritual place in the hearts of His people some form of opposition is sure to be encountered. Edom was a kindred people to Israel, and they represent those whom it is right for us to recognise as brethren, but who are marked by preference for what is natural or fleshly, and by despising the true birthright of the saints. They are content to have certain blessing from God, a territory which is a mark of His notice and favour, but which falls very short of what is in His purpose for His elect people. Such is the position of many believers in the reformed churches and in human systems where there is some light and blessing from God, but no practical taking up of the spiritual and heavenly ground to which He has called His people. We are not called upon to attack such persons (see Deuteronomy 2:4,5). But we must not expect them to

facilitate our movements towards the land, Their practices and teachings and literature will not help at all in that direction. They will rather obstruct true spiritual progress as much as possible. Their opposition will test faith and patience, for we shall have to keep clear of them, and this will involve the traversing of a wearisome and trying way, as we shall see in the next chapter. But let us remember how much we should have lost of spiritual education if Israel had gone straight into the land "by the king's road" through Edom! There are many lessons to be learned between Kadesh and "the plains of Moab by the Jordan of Jericho", and the obstruction of Edom was, after all, part of God's way, as giving occasion for those lessons to be learned.

Another important instruction for "the whole assembly" is found in the death of Aaron (verses 22 - 29). This was a clear intimation that "the levitical priesthood" could not bring the people into the "perfection" which God had in mind for His people (see Hebrews 7:11 - 28). Aaron had been involved in the sorrowful failure at the waters of Meribah, and this had been permitted in view of our learning that there must be a change of priest, as well as a change of law, if divine purpose was to be brought to fruition. The law and the levitical priesthood were in such connection with each other that both stood or fell together. The order of things which they represented, however full of typical meaning, as setting forth what was really connected with another order of things, was in itself incapable of bringing about what God had before Him.

So that Mount Hor is a place of special instruction for "the whole assembly". The system which had been known to the people in the wilderness, and under which they had been tested, could not bring them into that which Jehovah purposed to give them. One need hardly say that this instruction is much more for us than it was for them. They could not possibly have entered into all that it conveyed. "These things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Moses and Aaron "went up Mount Hor before the eyes of the whole assembly ... And the whole assembly saw that Aaron was dead". No divine or dispensational ordering that could stand in relation to us as in the flesh could possibly bring us into that which God has purposed for us in love. The whole legal system, and the levitical priesthood in connection with which it was set up, must give place to another system and a priesthood "according to power of indissoluble life". Such a priesthood was typically in view when Aaron's staff budded, for it was the token of life in resurrection power. "The whole assembly saw that Aaron was dead". But there had been another priest long before Aaron "of whom the witness is that he lives" (Hebrews 7:8). It is a Priest after

that order who alone can bring the people of God into that which His love has purposed. A dead priest can do nothing for us, but the purpose of God is secured now representatively in a living Priest who appears before the face of God for us.

The priestly office — represented by the holy garments — has passed from Aaron to Christ. It has passed to One who ever liveth, and who holds His priesthood in relation to us, not as in the flesh, but as God's elect and called people, and therefore in connection with all that is in God's purpose of love for us.

NUMBERS 21

Numbers 21

It is noticeable that from this point the people are characterised by overcoming their enemies. The Canaanite, the Amorite, the Bashanite, and the Midianite were enemies encountered on the wilderness side of Jordan, but they had to be overcome in view of reaching the land. They represent certain fleshly principles which oppose themselves to what is spiritual in the people of God. Perhaps the Canaanite, whose name probably means Trader, may be regarded as representing the desire for material prosperity, the ambition to get on in the world. It cannot be doubted that some of God's Israel have been taken prisoners by this king! (verse 1).

The vow made by Israel (verse 2) manifests a vigour and devotedness such as we have not seen previously in this book, and, viewed typically, it is the result of drinking the water from the rock, and of the investiture of the priest whose name speaks of divine help. The apprehension of what is in the mind of God for His people, and of Christ as Priest in relation to it, puts vigour into the soul, for it gives assurance that God is for us, and that He can be counted on to give power to overcome all that is against us. What is needed is purpose on our side, and this is set forth in the vow which Israel made. If we are really minded to overcome our spiritual enemies God gives us the victory over them. And this would certainly apply in any case where the desire for worldly prosperity was warring against the soul. Of how little account is such prosperity in view of the dissolution of the whole system of material things (2 Peter 3:10 - 14)! And how unworthy an object of pursuit, if compared with the wondrous thoughts and gifts of divine love! Let us be content to do with diligence whatever comes into our responsibility in the providential ordering of God, leaving our circumstances to His disposal. But let us be watchful and prayerful to keep our hearts free from every desire that would make the earthly of more importance to us, practically, than the heavenly. To have the enjoyment of what is ours according to divine love and purpose is far more important and precious than to gain the whole world.

This should be something more to us than a truth which we admit in an abstract way. The spirit of Israel's vow would lead to our being practical overcomers. When our commanding interest is that which God has before Him for us, it soon becomes very manifest, as on this occasion, that God is for us. And if He is for us, it matters little who is against us.

But even after such a victory as that recorded in verse 3, the ways of Jehovah brought to light a terrible spirit in the people. When we have experienced

spiritual refreshing and help, and have got definite victory over some of our spiritual enemies, we are apt to think that we have no more to learn of what the flesh is! But precisely at this point the deepest and most searching self-discovery came about. "And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go round the land of Edom" (verse 4). It was, no doubt, a disappointing experience. They were turned back from the land when they were apparently within easy reach of it, and they had to travel a long distance almost due south to the Red Sea. That is the kind of thing that happens sometimes when we have been refreshed and helped, and have got spiritual victories. When we think we are going to make progress, all is suddenly reversed. We seem to be sent back to where we were long ago, to begin as it were afresh. Such an experience as this gives occasion to the naughtiness of the flesh to break out as badly as ever.

"And the soul of the people became impatient on the way; and the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have ye brought us up out of Egypt that we should die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, and no water, and our soul loathes this light bread" (verse 5). It is a dreadful thing to find that, after knowing God's salvation for many years, and proving His faithfulness in a thousand ways, the mind of the flesh is still enmity against God. Because here it is just that. Their complaints were inexcusable. They had been in the wilderness forty years, and had not died! They had had bread from heaven — better food than anybody else in the world — and they had had water. It was simply that God's way and God's provision were altogether distasteful to them. What a revelation is this of the true state of man's heart and mind Godward! How often believers are appalled by what Solomon refers to when he says, "they shall know every man the plague of his own heart"! (1 Kings 8:38). How often they have to say, with Rebecca, "Why am I thus?" And this may be, too, when the great thoughts of God for His people are beginning to dawn upon us more clearly.

The truth is that God could not bring us into what His love proposes to give us without teaching us a profound fundamental lesson. We have to learn to judge our own flesh in the very source of its being morally, and we have to learn how God has secured its utter condemnation. "Then Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, which bit the people; and much people of Israel died" (verse 6). This visitation of God brought home in a sharp and terrible way that the naughtiness of the flesh is really satanic in origin. It is a poison introduced by Satan himself, "the ancient serpent, he who is called Devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9). Can we wonder that it is directly and positively adverse to God? It is a terrible thing to contemplate, but there is no full conviction of sin until this is brought home to one experimentally. The bite of

the fiery serpent is the divine conviction of what the flesh truly is in the very source of its being. Every bit of unbelief, rebellion, murmuring, every despising of what God would give in love, the distaste for Christ as God's great provision for men, can only be understood or estimated aright when we see that all had its origin in the serpent. God is bent on our being brought to judge the very root of the mischief, for it is only thus that we can appreciate the great action of His love for us. We shall never understand what life is as the gift of God until we realise that we are death-stricken, and deservedly so, and we can do absolutely nothing to extricate ourselves from that state or its consequences. We can only confess that it is so.

"And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, in that we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee: pray to Jehovah that he take away the serpents from us" (verse 7). This is the first true confession of sin by the people in this book. The words, "we have sinned" in chapter 14:40 cannot be regarded as a true confession, for they were accompanied by presumptuous transgression of Jehovah's commandment. They were no better than the formal confessions which are often made by people without any true sense of what their words mean. The importance of true confession of sin can hardly be exaggerated, for it changes the whole ground on which persons are with God. Whatever had been true on God's part towards Israel, they had never until now taken this ground with Him. It was the first true bit of self-judgment. They now realised that God and Moses — against whom their naughtiness had broken forth — were the only ones to whom they could turn. When the flesh is judged God can be trusted, and He is never really known or trusted until then.

"And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said to Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, and looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole; and it came to pass, if a serpent had bitten any man, and he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (verses 7 - 9).

That a serpent should be the type of Christ tells us plainly how He came to be identified — as lifted up upon the cross — with what the serpent had brought in. Some people think that the serpent lifted up is one of the simplest types in Scripture, but in truth it is one of the most profound. The whole mischief in man is traced to its serpent-source, but with a view to it being judged in the Sinless One. What sin is has been fully manifested in man. Positive hatred of God, even when revealed in grace in Christ, has come out in man, under pretence of zeal for God in the religious leaders of the Jews, and this accompanied by coarsest brutality and insult, both on their part and on the part of the common people and the Roman soldiers. I do not think it is too

much to say that enmity against God has been expressed in man in a way that would not have been permitted in Satan or his angels. *They* would not have dared to spit in the face of the blessed One, or to buffet Him. The lawless principle which originated in Satan has expressed itself in man. Our thoughts are not adjusted morally until we see the source from which all evil has emanated. No one judges his own flesh in a divine way until he sees that it is morally of Satan, and positively adverse to God. If that is so, every person that fears God must be conscious that it ought to be condemned. Then we are prepared to learn, as divinely taught, that God Himself is the source of good. His love is known by the supreme sacrifice which He made that men might be freed from all that came in by the serpent. God's great intent was that the lawless principle of sin which had expressed itself in man should be judged and condemned in Man, even in His beloved Son as Son of man.

The condemnation of sin in the flesh is an accomplished fact. "God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). In the type the serpent was lifted up in the fortieth year of the wilderness, but the love of God has now made it possible for us to begin with it. God, acting in love for His sinful creature man, has cleared the ground effectually, to His own satisfaction and glory, so that nothing now stands in the way of what His love proposes. We may take forty years to come to it, but since the lifting up of the Son of man it is there to come to. The youngest believer may begin with the knowledge through faith that all that he is morally as in the flesh has been condemned in Christ when he was a sacrifice for sin upon the cross. The great thoughts of divine love can take effect, for, on the divine side, the flesh is no longer there to obstruct them.

So that *life* comes in now as the gift of God. "It shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, and looketh upon it, shall live". Every death-stricken person could look away from himself to a divinely provided object, and in doing so, he lived. It is evident that those who lived at that time lived in view of going into the land in contrast to perishing in the wilderness. It was not the time then to speak of *eternal* life, for the things were only typical, but what was really in the mind of God came out in the Lord's own words to Nicodemus. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal" (John 3:14 - 16). The serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, but those who lived by looking upon it lived in view of going over Jordan into the inheritance. According to the divine thought they lived for the inheritance, hence the Lord, in giving present application to the type, brings in eternal life. God's love has

not in view for men merely a better kind of life for this world, but a life of a totally different kind and order from anything that man knows naturally — a life altogether outside the range of death. There is a testimony in the serpent lifted up in the wilderness of what is in God's heart for men, though the thing itself lies outside the wilderness. Life is not in the man that is here, for he has to look to Another to get it, but the One to whom he looks has been given in death as the great witness of the love of God. Even the Son of God has died here, bearing the condemnation of the sinful man, but in view of living in a condition altogether outside this world in the sphere of resurrection. It is of the utmost importance to see that the sphere into which He entered as risen from among the dead is the sphere of that life which the love of God has in view for men. Indeed, as we know, eternal life is in the Son of God; it is altogether outside the life of flesh. To many believers the gift of eternal life suggests very little more than the assurance of eternal security. But it means that we consciously appreciate and enjoy the love of God, and the spiritual conditions which that love has established, into which we enter as believing on the One who has been lifted up. Eternal life is clearly outside the whole natural order of things, for everything of that order is under death.

Looking at the serpent of brass and living evidently corresponds in a typical way with what the Lord spoke of to Nicodemus. He presented to that enquiring soul what was in the mind of God to give to men, consequent upon His own lifting up. All that was involved in it was not opened up; that awaited development in due time. It was, we might say, the great proposal of divine love, that God has loved men in view of eternal life. Such a proposal is calculated to awaken the most lively desires to know what is comprehended in this great gift, and to have conscious possession and enjoyment of it. Eternal life is the great act of favour of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). We might say that the land of Canaan was Israel's by divine gift before they left Egypt. It is constantly spoken of as the land which Jehovah would give them. But it is obvious that it was not theirs in conscious possession until they put their feet on it.

The type we are considering teaches us that sinful flesh must be ended under divine condemnation, and the death which rests upon it by God's judgment must be annulled by One going into it who was personally exempt from it, if men are to live. Life involves the gift of the Spirit, for "the Spirit [is] life on account of righteousness" (Romans 8:10), and it is written that "if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). We read also, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). We have no power to live in freedom from the law of sin and death even in wilderness conditions apart from the

Spirit. God "has condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in Us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit" (Romans 8:4). The condemnation of the flesh in the lifting up of the Son of man was in view of an altogether new power coming in by the Spirit, so that instead of the flesh overcoming us we might be empowered to overcome the flesh, and to do the will of God in the very scene and circumstances where we formerly did our own will. Until this is brought about we cannot be said to *live* in any true sense Godward.

But much more than this was in God's mind when He gave us His Holy Spirit. He had before Him that region of life eternal of which the land over Jordan was a type, and of which we have already spoken. And His people are seen here as moving in that direction. "The children of Israel journeyed, and encamped in Oboth. And they removed from Oboth, and encamped at Ijim-Abarim, in the wilderness that is before Moab, toward the sun-rising" (verses 10,11). They had been actually travelling with their backs upon the land, but now they turned eastward. It was a movement which represents a most important turning point in the history of our souls. For the sun-rising speaks of the coming up of the glorious light of what is in the mind and purpose of God. It will shine forth publicly at the coming of the Lord, but it shines in a spiritual way now when Christ comes into view as shedding forth the light of what is in the mind of God for man. To encamp toward the sun-rising was the turning point for the land. It typifies the great change which is brought about when believers begin to consider Christ as the One in whom God has put the light of His great proposals of love. The thought and purpose of God becomes a dominant influence, and the faces of His people are turned towards what He cherishes and delights to give. It will be a wondrous day for the children of Israel and the children of Judah when they seek Jehovah their God, and "inquire concerning Zion, with their faces thitherward" (Jeremiah 1:5). And it is a wondrous new day in the soul's history when Christ becomes to it the light of all that is in God's love and purpose.

It is to be noted that from this point there is abundance of water. We read of "the torrent Zered" (verse 12), "the brooks of Arnon", "the stream of the brooks which turneth to the dwelling of Ar" (verses 14,15).

They are coming into conditions which have something in common with the land as "a land of water-brooks". And as it is "the book of the wars of Jehovah" which speaks of these brooks I think we are justified in regarding them as sources of refreshment for God's people which become available as a result of spiritual conflicts. They are not in the land, but they are refreshing to those who are on the way to it, and who are moving in heavenly light. If we

were deprived of all the refreshments in ministry which have come to Us in connection with "the wars of Jehovah" we should find ourselves in a much drier land than we are in at present. Almost everything that has been specially refreshing to the people of God in these last days has had to be contended for. Every part of the truth connected with the presence of the Spirit, and the order of the assembly in relation to it, has had to be fought for. We drink freely of many brooks today of which the Spirit of God would remind us that their history is written in "the book of the wars of Jehovah".

How good it is when God can take account of us as identified with His cause in a militant way, so that His enemies are our enemies, and our victories are His victories. This is one great result of having beheld the serpent lifted up. Divine power is now engaged in every conflict. It is not that we have to contend in our weakness against powers too strong for us, but as enlisted in Jehovah's host we engage in His wars, and have the power of His Spirit to secure victory over all that is adverse to Him and to the progress and prosperity of His people. From this point to the taking of Jericho the people are victorious in every conflict.

The incidents of this chapter are great spiritual landmarks. Life as a result of beholding the serpent lifted up; then the turn towards the sun-rising; then the thought of conflicts which are definitely "the wars of Jehovah".

"And from thence to Beer: that is the well of which Jehovah spoke to Moses, Assemble the people, and I will give them water" (verse 16). This is a very precious type for it speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the line of excess. It is not here the answer to necessitous conditions such as led to murmuring in Exodus 17, and Numbers 20. It is God's proposal in His own free and sovereign love, and it brings out in a wonderful way what God would have to mark His people subjectively. Because in this case the supply is not from the rock, but from a well; it springs up from beneath. It is the Spirit regarded as rising up within the believer according to the Lord's words: "the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life" (John 4:14).

In considering the Spirit as the water from the rock our attention is directed more especially to Christ. The Spirit is given in consequence of His being smitten (Exodus 17), or as coming from Him in His exaltation (Numbers 20). But in John 4, while the living water is clearly the gift of God and the gift of Christ, the Lord lays stress on the form which it would take in the believer. It would become a fountain or well in the one who received it. This is a purely subjective thought, and such thoughts are very exercising because they are not abstract truth, but spiritual and experimental realities which are either

verified as being such or their value is little known. Not that there can be any question as to the giving on the divine side. "Assemble the people, and I will give them water". "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water". But the instruction of the type before us must be added to fill out in our apprehension what is requisite if the value of the well is to be realised.

There is first of all a spontaneous outburst of song. For it is not here that Moses sings, and the children of Israel with him, as in Exodus 15. But here, "Then Israel sang this song, Rise up, well! sing unto it". Jehovah's proposal to give them water awoke a lively and appreciative response. They were not merely thankful to know that the water was there, but their hearts broke forth in earnest desire that it should rise up. They would encourage the well by singing to it. We should remember that if it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, it is also possible to please and cheer Him by our hearty appreciation of His presence, and of all that it may mean to us. The blessedness of the Well will only be realised by those who know how to value it, and who encourage it to "Rise up".

Then the water which is procured from a "well" differs from that which flows in a stream or river, inasmuch as diligent labour has had to be expended so that it may become accessible, and may rise up without obstruction. The thought of wells being dug is brought before us particularly in Genesis 26. And here we read, "Well which princes digged, which the nobles of the people hollowed out at the word of the lawgiver, with their staves" (verse 18). The water was given, but its accessibility was dependent on the well being dug and hollowed out by the princes and nobles. Spiritual nobility comes out in such labour as this. Many believers accept as truth that they have the Spirit, but they are quiescent; there are no energetic movements of soul to get the present gain of the fountain that springs up into life eternal.

"The word of the lawgiver" must direct. It comes to us in many scriptures, and especially in Romans, I Corinthians, and Galatians. If we prayerfully consider these epistles we shall see what a great place the Spirit of God is to have with us. If we are according to Spirit we shall mind "the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5); they will be our predominant interest. We must by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body if we wish to "live" (Romans 8:13). And we have to sow to the Spirit in order to reap from the Spirit eternal life (Galatians 6:8). The word "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" is found in Ephesians 4 alongside the mention of many things which do grieve Him, and which therefore have to be judged and set aside by all those who would have the

gain of His presence. The digging and hollowing out of the well clearly typify the removal by diligent exercise of all that which would hinder the water from becoming available.

Then there is something more in this type than the free springing up of the Well in the individual believer, though that would be included in it because the greater includes the less. Jehovah's word here is, "Assemble the people, and I will give them water". So that there is in it the thought of a rising up of spiritual invigoration amongst the saints as assembled. If every fleshly thought and feeling and motive were judged by the saints before coming together, what liberty there would be for spiritual affections to flow! No doubt many of us have proved something of the reality of this at times, but it is certain that if there were more diligent *digging* the flow of the living water would be much more abundant. The word, "be filled with the Spirit", is addressed to the saints collectively, and it puts upon us all responsibility to see that nothing is retained which would hinder the Spirit from having full place with us. To labour to this end is a mark of princely dignity and true nobility amongst the people of God.

The consideration of all this will help us to understand how Israel is viewed typically from this point onward in this book. They are seen in the latter part of this chapter as victorious over Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan. (For remarks on the typical significance of these two kings the reader is referred to "An Outline of Deuteronomy", chapters 2,3). In chapters 22 - 24 they are seen and described by Balaam as a separate and justified and beautified people. Then they are numbered in view of going into the inheritance, and the remainder of the book is mainly preparatory to their entering upon it. They are typically God's elect people, the subjects of His work, and having His Spirit for power. To use New Testament language, they are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, and, in singing to the Well, we see them identified in their interests and affections with all that the Spirit would bring in and lead them into. All this corresponds with how the people of God are viewed in Romans 8.

NUMBERS 22

Numbers 22

The children of Israel are seen here at the gate of the promised land; they are "on the other side of the Jordan from Jericho" (verse 1). But at this point the Spirit of God turns aside from their history and experiences, and takes us behind the scenes to disclose the thoughts and counsels of their adversaries. That there should be a people on earth who have learned to judge the flesh, and to give place to the Spirit, and thus to become victorious over influences which are hostile to God, is a cause of fear and aversion (verse 3) to the pride of man as represented by Moab. (See Isaiah 16; Jeremiah 48). The pride of man realises that its very existence is at stake; all that nourishes it will be licked up "as an ox licks up the green herb of the field" (verse 4) unless something can be done to weaken that which has come out of the world by God's redemption and salvation. A people not in the flesh but in the Spirit must, if possible, be brought under a curse and driven out of the land (verse 6).

God makes known to us that such counsels are in progress. For it is not here open warfare, but a secret plan to bring a curse on His people, and to render null and void His thoughts of blessing. We may think it madness to attempt such a thing, but it is a madness which is inherent in the pride of man's heart. The pride of man, wherever it works, has in it the spirit of curse towards what is approved of God; it has the disposition to curse what God has blessed. Paul would not have asked, "who against us? ... Who shall bring an accusation against God's elect? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:31; Romans 8:33; Romans 8:35) if there had not been powers adverse to God's people who would wish to damage them, even if unable to do so. God is pleased to let us know that there is a power working behind the scenes which is minded to bring a curse upon us, but He lets us know this that we may learn most definitely His thoughts of blessing, and the character of His work in His elect people.

Balak, to gain his object, sent to Mesopotamia for a man reputed to have power to bless and to curse (verse 6). Balaam had some knowledge of the true God, and could use Jehovah's name, but there was with him an unholy mixture of the divine and the satanic, for he used enchantments also. He was a corrupt and money-loving man, the prototype of the false teachers and ungodly persons who appear in times of departure and apostasy, and in whom is concentrated intense opposition to all that is spiritual (see 2 Peter 2:15,16; Jude 11).

"And God said to Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed" (verse 12). The proposal to curse the people was a direct challenge to God, and He answered it Himself. His people had nothing to say or to do in the matter; it was just a question whether the enemy could prevail to curse those whom God had blessed. It was all settled really in those three words, "They are blessed". All the contrariety of the flesh in His people had been exposed, but it had also been, typically, condemned in the serpent lifted up. The people, as singing to the well, had been seen identified, in affection and purpose, with the Spirit. So that the love of God was free to have its own way, and He could say, "They are blessed". "But Jehovah thy God would not listen to Balaam; and Jehovah thy God turned the curse into blessing unto thee, because Jehovah thy God loved thee" (Deuteronomy 23:5).

It is not that the flesh in God's people is any better than the flesh in others, but His saints have learned to judge it, and to be thankful to see it condemned in the Son of man lifted up. They believe on the only begotten Son of God as the only source of life, and they live in virtue of having the Spirit. All this is the outcome of sovereign love on God's part, according to which He has worked in His people. It is impossible for Him to curse, or to allow to be cursed, what He has Himself wrought in the sovereignty of His love. It is an unquestionable fact that the saints are the product of a wonderful working of God (see Romans 14:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 2:10). It is therefore possible for them to be regarded from that point of view, and in so regarding them they are seen in a character which attaches to them by grace, and which is entirely different to that which attached to them by nature, or as in the flesh. We may be sure that God takes account of us according to what He has wrought, for that is what we are truly as His elect. God's people cannot be cursed because they are the subjects of His work, according to His electing love. We could hardly have this set forth, even in type, in the actual history of Israel, and that is why we are turned aside from that history to see God's ways with Balaam, and to learn how he was made to express what is true of the saints regarded purely as subjects of the work of God. Balsam's parables are of great spiritual value as helping us to view the saints, and ourselves amongst them, in the light of what they are by the work of God. This is an essential preparation for the inheritance, for it is only as subjects of the work of God that we can enter upon the inheritance, or even have any true appreciation of it. None but those who are the subjects of God's work are blessed. Flesh is never blessed; it is condemned; and if there was nothing divinely wrought in men the thought of blessing would have no place. The fact that Jehovah said,

"they are blessed", was the truth that they were, typically, apart from the flesh, not only by the death of Christ, but as being the subjects of His work.

The enemy regards men from the standpoint of his own works. He knows what to expect from the flesh, but he is baffled when he meets with the work of God. He was quite mistaken about Job. He expected Job to curse God, and so he would if there had been nothing there but what Job was by nature. But Job had been the subject of divine working, and therefore he did not curse God even when greatly tried.

Jehovah saying, "they are blessed", should have settled the matter definitely, but these words evidently did not take out of Balsam's mind the thought that perhaps, after all, it might be possible to curse them, and to earn the wages of unrighteousness which he loved. So that when another call came from Balak to come and curse the people, he said to the princes sent, "And now, I pray you, abide ye also here this night, and I shall know what Jehovah will say to me further" (verse 19). He feared to come into conflict with the power of God, like Gamaliel in Acts 5:39, but his heart was unchanged.

God, seeing the motives that were actuating him, took special means to put a check upon him. The Angel of Jehovah set Himself in the way as an adversary against him, and he had a three-fold warning that the way in which he was moving was for his ruin. He was really blinder and more foolish than his ass, and God used the ass to forbid his folly. No folly could be greater than for Satan or for men to think that they can defeat God, and bring a curse where He has put a blessing. And God knows how to control the most wicked man in the world, and how to make him say and do just what he does not at all intend to say or do. It pleases God sometimes to assert His power over even unconverted men, and make them feel it. The absolute supremacy of God is one of the greatest comforts of faith. In this case He was pleased to make Balaam His servant, to declare in presence of the pride and hatred of man what His people are as the subjects of His work, and as those on whom His blessing rests. This has been made known for our learning, for it sets forth what is now brought to pass in spiritual reality in those whom God has taken out of the nations for His name.

NUMBERS 23

Numbers 23

The seven altars which Balaam asked Balak to build, and upon each of which he offered up a bullock and a ram, were probably suggested by some knowledge which Balaam had acquired of the sacrifices which God had appointed to be offered by His people. He said to God, "I have disposed seven altars, and have offered up a bullock and a ram upon each altar" (verse 4). Ungodly men may take up what is in the Scriptures, and even speak of Christ and His death, when they have no true appreciation of the import of these things, nor any desire for the good of the people whom God has blessed. But, however corrupt the motives that governed Balaam and Balak, it was no doubt, ordered by God that they should offer what spoke *to Him* of Christ. It was like the prophecy of Caiaphas in John 11:50 - 52, uttered to his own condemnation, but declaring on God's part most wondrous and precious truth. If Balaam had light enough to think that a burnt-offering would be acceptable to God, he should have known that it could not be the ground of curse but of blessing. It should have suggested to him that it was on the ground of the burnt-offering that Jehovah had said, "they are blessed"! But neither Balaam nor Caiaphas knew anything spiritually of what was bound up, by the wisdom of God, in what they said and did.

"And Jehovah put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return to Balak, and thus shalt thou speak" (verse 5). The perfection of Christ, and of His offering, has come before God; it has glorified God about all that in which man in the flesh was offensive to Him. And, on that ground, His elect become the subjects of divine working, and are taken out of the world for blessing. God works in His sovereign love to bring this about. Balaam's parables are of great importance as bringing out what God is doing in His great love and power. He will have a people for Himself in spite of the enemy, and in spite of what the flesh is. He brings about that there are those who are "born of water and of Spirit". Such persons are morally separated from the world of evil. They cannot be cursed, whatever devices of darkness are set in motion against them. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I denounce whom Jehovah doth not denounce?" (verse 8).

"For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (verse 9). One of the most elementary thoughts as to the assembly is that God has "visited to take out of the nations a people for his name"; His Name is invoked on them. This is a sovereign operation of God, "who does

these things known from eternity" (Acts 15:14 - 17). The word "assembly" (ecclesia) means a "called out" company, separated from the world by the call of God. God's people are saints by calling; they are the called ones of Jesus Christ. Redemption, new birth, faith in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, and all the divine working in men, go to secure "a people that shall dwell alone" — God's elect. The ones who would be called were all in the divine view long before they were called. Indeed, they were chosen in Christ before the world's foundation, and "written from the founding of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb". So the Shepherd could say, "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). Every Gentile sheep that the Shepherd would bring was known to Him as His, many of us long centuries before we were born. Soon after the commencement of Paul's labours in Corinth the Lord said to him, "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Many of them were not yet called, but they would be. We can understand how Paul would look at them as "those that are called" — persons appropriated by the Lord, and ever to be regarded in this light, notwithstanding much that was a grief to him. It is important that we should understand that we are not saints merely because at a certain time we decided for Christ, or believed on Him, but because God has called us in sovereign love. From the moment of our natural birth we were regarded by God in the light of the fact that He had marked us out for calling by grace (see Galatians 1:15).

Then from the time that new birth took place there began to be a distinct moral separation from the world. Persons born anew are different from the world; they are repentant, and have exercises which mark them off from others. Perhaps most believers can look back to exercises in unconverted days which they recognise now as divine movements tending to separate them from the course of this world. "But we ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, that God has chosen you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereto he has called you by our glad tidings, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). Paul mentions ten lepers in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10, and he adds, "And these things were some of you; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God". "Ye have been washed" speaks of moral cleansing from the filthiness of the heathen world, and "ye have been sanctified" shows that they were set apart for God. They were a people dwelling alone, and not reckoned among the nations! All had been really brought about in the power of the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

How could a people so set apart by a sovereign work of God come under His curse? It is impossible.

He who has begun in them a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day (Philippians 1:6). If we think of what man can do, or of how he can endure, there is no stability or security at all, but if we think of the work of God, all is ordered and sure. The line of His working is as a golden chain stretching across time, but fixed at both ends in eternity. The saints are called according to purpose; they are foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, glorified, every link in the chain is absolutely unbreakable; its strength lies in God, and in His purpose of sovereign love.

How blessed to see that God calls attention to His elect as an innumerable company! "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" (verse 10). People think of God's election as narrowing up blessing, but it is usually presented in Scripture as securing a vast number for blessing who otherwise would have none. God will not be content with a few; He will have His house *full*.

Even Balaam was, for the moment, affected by what he saw: "Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his" (verse 10). I suppose most people would like to die the death of the righteous, but they have no desire to live the life of the righteous, for that is a life of separation from the world and from the flesh.

Though so definitely rebuffed, Balak did not abandon the desire to have the people cursed, for Jehovah was minded to make known still more of His design to bless them. Balak thought that if they could not all be cursed perhaps some of them could, so he would bring Balaam to a spot from whence he could "see only the extremity of them" (verse 13). It will be remembered that the beginning of murmuring in this book (chapter 11:1) was followed by the fire of Jehovah burning among the people, which "consumed some in the extremity of the camp". This suggests that it was amongst those farthest from the tabernacle that murmuring was most pronounced. Some tidings of this might have reached Balak's ears, but, whether or not, "the extremity of them" would be those who were most remote from Jehovah's sanctuary. Balak's thought was that those in such a position were more likely to come under curse than all the people. This was the subtlety of the serpent. How the enemy would take advantage of the want of spirituality, the low state, the actual failures and sins, of God's people, to bring them, if possible, under a curse! He is the accuser of the brethren before God day and night, and no doubt there is often that which gives him ground to accuse so that the

brethren can only "overcome him by reason of the blood of the Lamb" (see Revelation 12:10,11).

But Balak had to learn, and we by the same parable, that not even "the extremity" of God's people can be cursed. Not even those who might seem to the enemy to have given good cause for cursing! They are God's elect, and none can bring an accusation against them that will be heard; they are justified from all things. And this stands connected with the unchangeable truth of God, and with the fact that His gifts and calling are not subject to repentance (Romans 11:29). "God is not a man that he should lie; neither a son of man, that he should repent" (verse 19). How good it is to see that all depends on the truth and faithfulness of God! He had said long before, "And I will take you to me for a people, and will be your God; and ye shall know that I, Jehovah your God, am he who bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land concerning which I swore to give it unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; and I will give it you for a possession: I am Jehovah" (Exodus 6:7,8). Nothing can invalidate this; it is God who speaks, not man. "Shall he say and not do? and shall he speak and not make it good?" (verse 19). God will have a people, and He will bless them, in spite of every evil power in the universe. Hence Balaam is made to say, "Behold, I have received mission to bless; and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it" (verse 20).

But how could God have a people for Himself, secured for blessing, if He was not able to justify them from all things connected with their former sinful history? Justification is a necessity from the side of man's responsibility, if he is to be freed from every charge that might be brought against him, but it is also a necessity from the side of God's purpose. How could He have a people to whom righteousness required Him to impute sin? How could such be consciously in His favour and blessing? The marvellous truth is that God Himself justifies, so that it can be said, "In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (Isaiah 45:25). He is perfectly just in justifying those who believe in Jesus, for He does it on the ground that their sins have been borne, as typified in the scape-goat of the day of atonement, and the sin in their flesh has been condemned, as typified in the serpent lifted up. So that in divine righteousness it can be said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen wrong in Israel" (verse 21).

There is no human illustration of justification. A man proved innocent of the charge brought against him may leave a court of justice without any imputation resting upon him. But for a man guilty of many offences to be held

righteously freed from all imputation is a thing unknown save in the divine ways of infinite grace.

But the "one righteousness" which Christ accomplished on the cross, in virtue of which God justifies, had in view what Scripture calls "justification of life" (Romans 5:18). Men are justified in view of God henceforth having His place with them. The justified man of Psalm 32:1,2 is henceforth the godly man of verse 6. A man is justified that he may have the Spirit, and thus have God with him as power to overcome the flesh and all that is evil here. This is set forth in the words, "Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in his midst. God brought him out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a buffalo" (verses 21,22). God is with His justified people, and His Spirit indwells them; His kingdom is there, not merely in word but in power.

This being the case, "there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel" (verse 23). It will be noticed that in each of the four parables Balaam uses the two names. "Jacob" speaks of the saints in their responsible life of exercise and discipline, but "Israel" suggests their princely place with God according to His calling. But in neither aspect can the power of evil prevail against them, for they are the work of God. "At this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (verse 23). It is not here what God has *thought* — what He has in mind and purpose — but what He has *wrought*. It brings before us the permanent stability of the work of God in His saints. Whether viewed as in responsibility here, as in Romans, or abstractly in Christ, as in 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Corinthians 12:2, the saints are wrought of God. He has wrought us for that condition of glory which He has purposed for us (2 Corinthians 5:5), but in the meantime we are in the wilderness as a people of whom it can be said, "What hath God wrought!"

These parables view the people of God, not as in the flesh, but as the product of the work of God. As identified in mind and affection with the Spirit as the Well of chapter 21:16 - 18 we become spiritually competent to entertain these precious thoughts, and to know them as divine realities. Overcoming is secured on this line, which I understand to be conveyed in the closing words of this parable. "Lo, the people will rise up as a lioness, and lift himself up as a lion. He shall not lie down until he hath eaten the prey and drunk the blood of the slain".

No wonder that Balak said, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all" (verse 25). It grieved him to hear of Jacob and Israel as the wondrous product of the grace and work of God. But there was yet more to be brought out of what the saints are, viewed in this light. So Balak was permitted to make one more attempt to get them cursed, in order that the Spirit of God might

delineate for us the beauty and attractiveness which mark the saints in the wilderness, viewed as God's workmanship.

"And Balak brought Balaam to the top of Peor, which looks over the surface of the waste" (verse 28). Balak could see nothing there but a "waste", and that seemed to favour cursing. He could see nothing of that "vision of the Almighty" which was just about to be seen and described by Balaam. May we have eyes to see it, so that we may henceforth have clear perception of the beauty which the work of God produces in His saints, Not merely seeing it as Balaam saw it — a beautiful vision of something in which he would never have any part — but seeing it as that which will be produced in us if we walk in the Spirit. For what Balaam saw is the portrayal, in a figurative way, of the spiritual beauty which the work of God in His people produces, even in wilderness conditions.

NUMBERS 24

Numbers 24

Balaam, convinced at last that it was good in the sight of Jehovah to bless Israel, "went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness". He "saw Israel dwelling in tents according to his tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him". He could now speak as a "man of opened eye", seeing things for himself, though conscious that he was a falling man. It is evident that what Balaam saw did not affect him at all morally, and the thought of this should lead us to pray that we may not, even in the slightest degree, resemble him. To see divine things without being morally affected by them is most dreadful. May God preserve us from it!

"Israel dwelling in tents according to his tribes" (verse 2) would be in the divine order as set forth in the early chapters of this book. The antitype of this is seen in the order of the assembly according to 1 Corinthians. Let that epistle be carefully and prayerfully considered. It sets forth how the cross is to be known as the setting aside of man after the flesh, and the Spirit to be recognised as bringing in what is of God. Then the fellowship of God's Son will be understood as that to which we are called in the faithfulness of God. And we shall learn that Christian fellowship is the fellowship of the blood and of the body of Christ, and that it is essential that we should be faithfully committed to it. Only thus can the Lord's supper be eaten according to its divine order. Then it is clear that the saints are to be recognised as the body — the anointed vessel of divine pleasure here. And gifts are to be exercised in the spirit of love. We must not think that these things are not intended to be realised in a practical way. They have been largely set aside by the teachings of men, but they remain as the Lord's commandment for "all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". In these things we can see something of the beautiful order which, according to the truth, marks the assembly of God in the wilderness.

"How goodly are thy tents, Jacob, and thy tabernacles, Israel!" (verse 5). The distinction between the "tents" and the "tabernacles" may be gathered, by analogy, from the fact that the "tabernacle" in Exodus 26 comprised the ten inner curtains of twined byssus, while the "tent" was made up of the eleven curtains of goats' hair which formed an outer protective covering for the "tabernacle". I conclude from this that the goodly tents of Jacob represent the saints as having come, through moral exercise in responsibility, to self-judgment and to the maintenance of unleavened purity, so that they are marked by a holy separation which corresponds with the tent of goats' hair

over the tabernacle. The truth of 1 Corinthians applies to us, as I understand, in "Jacob" character; that is, as viewed in responsibility here with exercises which are relative to the unholy conditions around us. That epistle, if taken up in genuine exercise, would produce a self-judged and separate people, amongst whom the Spirit could act without restraint, and where love would be followed. All this would provide protection for what is of God, so that it should not be contaminated by the evil influences here.

The "tabernacles" are connected with "Israel", which sets forth the saints viewed as in princely dignity with God as the subjects of His purpose and calling. As firmly attached to Christ in the power of the anointing, and as sealed, and having the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts, the saints are viewed as in "Israel" character (see 2 Corinthians 1:21,22). Viewed in this light, the saints are competent to understand new covenant ministry, and the truth of reconciliation and new creation. Indeed, 2 Corinthians leads on to the thought of "a man in Christ" — a man spiritually great enough to be caught up to Paradise. I should connect the thought of "tabernacles" with this side of things. The saints become a shrine in the wilderness for all those precious things which are "for glory to God by us". So that I think in a general way we see the saints as the tents of Jacob in 1 Corinthians, and as the tabernacles of Israel in 2 Corinthians. It is touching to see how Paul dignifies the saints in 2 Corinthians. He says, "Now he that establishes *us with you*" — not you with us, but "us with you" — giving them, as it were, the first place in relation to this great operation of God. "The riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory" seems to present a "tabernacle" idea, for it conveys the thought of vessels which are suitable to enshrine the glory, either morally or actually. Peter on the holy mount wanted to make three tabernacles to retain the glory here! No doubt he understood later that himself and James and John, as representing the called company of the present time, were being prepared to be the tabernacles of the glory in a spiritual sense here, as well as actually in the kingdom.

The epistles of Peter and that to the Hebrews speak of the saints in a character which answers to the goodly tents of Jacob and the tabernacles of Israel. They are seen as preserved here by moral exercises in relation to God — "kept guarded by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time". But they are also seen as having joy unspeakable and filled with glory, and as having present entrance into the blessedness of the kingdom as seen on the holy mount. In Hebrews the many sons are being brought to glory, and we read of "the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, and not man". But it is all to be known as a spiritual reality, characterising the saints while they are still in wilderness conditions. "The

vision of the Almighty" does not bring into view things that are spiritually unreal, but things which His work brings to pass in His people. It was a purely abstract view when Balaam saw it, for the true Israel of God had not then come into being; but it was a typical and prophetic view of what the work of God is now bringing to pass. We may be conscious that it is only made good in us in a very partial way, but it is well to see that it is on this line that God is working in us. What we see here is something more than God's thoughts about His people; it presents His thoughts as realised in His people by His working in them.

"Like valleys are they spread forth, like gardens by the river side" (verse 6). This speaks of a lowly people, yet fertile for God. A garden is a cultivated spot, on which special care is expended with a view to peculiar satisfaction being afforded to the owner. It suggests variety, as we may see in the allusions in the Song of Songs (chapter 4:12 - 16). The precious fruits, the flowers, the chief spices, present in beautiful figure what the Spirit brings forth as His own fruit in the saints (Galatians 5:22,23).

"Like aloe-trees which Jehovah hath planted" (verse 6). I understand that the aloe referred to is a very rare and fragrant tree whose sweet scent develops by age; the older it is the more fragrant it becomes. It is so valued in the east as to be sometimes worth its weight in gold. It seems to suggest a fragrance in the saints which matures by experience. Who can doubt that those who have habitually to do with God will carry a peculiar fragrance? It is a choice product of divine grace which is specially to be looked for in saints who have had long experience of God in the wilderness.

"Like cedars beside the waters" (verse 6). It may be gathered that this refers to the public bearing of the saints, for we read of Christ prophetically. "His bearing as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars" (Song of Songs 5:16). The bearing of Christ was excellent under all circumstances. How He carried Himself in the temple as a boy of twelve! Everything was comely; He was there as a learner in presence of the teachers, "hearing them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46,47). Wherever we look at Him: as tempted in the wilderness; or in the synagogue at Nazareth; or when they would have made Him a king; or when Lazarus died; or when apprehended in the garden; or as before the high priest, or Pilate, or Herod; the excellent bearing of the cedar is always to be seen. As His saints move in the grace and power of the anointing it will be seen also in them: the thing true in Him will become true in them. It is humbling that we come so far short of this. No doubt the reason is that practically our roots fail to draw from "the waters"; we do not "walk by the

Spirit" (Galatians 5:26). But normal Christianity is to live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. This would surely give us an excellent bearing.

"Water shall flow out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in great waters" (verse 7). This suggests that not only is there the general flow of the Spirit as typified in "the river" and "the waters", but each saint has his own "bucket" full. The supply in the river is unstinted; it is, as we sing sometimes, a "perennial river"; but the "buckets" are the measure of what we have dipped out for ourselves. There is a somewhat similar thought in Matthew 25 there is a general store of oil which can be drawn upon, set forth in "those that sell", but the prudent virgins take "oil in their vessels"; they secure a personal supply. We read in Zechariah 4 of "two olive-trees" as sources of supply of the Spirit, but there is also a lamp-stand with a bowl and seven lamps thereon, giving the thought of a vessel in which the supply becomes available for light. The vessel must be suitable, and nothing allowed to choke the golden tubes that supply it with oil. In the scripture before us the "buckets" represent what we have made our own by the Spirit so that it may become available as refreshment for others. I cannot practically furnish more than I have, but if my bucket is full there is something which can be ministered to refresh others. It is a pity if our "buckets" are not larger now than they were ten years ago! Young men and fathers should surely have larger "buckets" than babes! Then "his seed shall be in great waters" is the evangelical side — the testimony of grace going out to all. God will yet use Israel to spread the knowledge of Himself amongst the nations, and this is true of the assembly today. Whatever knowledge of God there is in the world comes through His people.

"And his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted" (verse 7). The influence that rules amongst the saints is greater than the mightiest influence in the world. I suppose Agag would be the king of Amalek (see 1 Samuel 15), and Amalek is said to be "the first of the nations" in verse 20 of our chapter. Agag would represent what has the first place amongst men. But our King is higher than Agag, for He has gone up to the right hand of God. God has said of Him, "I will make him firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:27). The born King of Matthew 2, the anointed King of Psalm 2, the lowly King of Zechariah 9, the gracious and righteous King of Psalm 45, will yet be King of kings, and Lord of lords. "All kings shall bow down before him" (Psalm 72:11). He will have public eminence soon, but He has a wonderful rule even now in a spiritual way. There is a rule set up in heaven in the Lord Jesus Christ, and though it is in mystery — that is, only known to those initiated into it — it is exercising sway over the thousands of them that love God and keep His commandments. It is an immense comfort to think of the greatness of Christ, and the power of the influence which

emanates from Him. How would the thousands of young saints be kept today, in face of all the blighting and infidel influences that are brought to bear upon them, if there were not a far greater influence being exerted from heaven? The saints are to be the evidence that the influence of Christ is greater for them than all the influences of the world put together. Every moral trait that is really beautiful—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control—is developed under the influence of Christ. Sweet and exalted influences are emanating from heaven. The Lord came in as a lowly Babe, and was here as One “meek and lowly in heart”, but what was in view was His taking up a place in heaven, and influencing men from thence. His first word of ministry in Matthew’s gospel was, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh”. It was as though He said, I am passing through on the way to heaven; I am going to rule from there; now repent of all that which is the result of being ruled from below, that you may come under a rule which is from above.

“His kingdom shall be exalted” speaks of the power in which the saints are set up here, and the next three verses enlarge upon this. They are seen as having the strength of a buffalo, getting the victory over all their enemies, and, finally, laying down like a lion in unchallenged supremacy. It is very much like “in all these things we more than conquer through him that has loved us” (Romans 8:37). “But the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). “But thanks to God, who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). And not only are the people of God blessed, but “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (verse 9).

The fourth parable refers to “the end of days” (verse 14); it looks on to the great issue of God’s ways, when a Star will come out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel (verse 17). It refers to the coming of the Lord, but in a peculiar way; that is, as manifesting Him in a character which He has previously acquired in the hearts of His saints. He is not seen here exactly as coming out of heaven, but as coming “out of Jacob”; the Sceptre is to rise “out of Israel”. This fourth parable is a continuation of the other three, and directly connected with the same subject. It is the same “Jacob” and “Israel” as we have seen in the previous parables, but seen now as those *out of whom* Christ comes to reign. It conveys the thought that all that He is as the Star and the Sceptre — all that He will be as manifested at His coming — is already cherished in the hearts of His saints, so that it can be regarded as coming out *from thence* to set aside everything that is hostile to God. It is a beautiful thought in relation to the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The "Star" is a symbol which evidently has place in the night period. It speaks of One who is to be in ascendancy, but who is only recognised as such by holy watchers. "We have seen his star in the east, and have come to do him homage", say the magi (Matthew 2:2). They had been observant of the heavens while others were sleeping, and had seen *His* star; they were prepared to be loyal and devoted subjects of His while He was as yet in lowly guise here. They represent a Gentile company who own His kingly rights before the Jews are willing to call Him blessed.

To us the "Star" is the "morning star" — the herald of the coming day. To the overcomer in Thyatira the Son of God promises to give authority over the nations, as He has received from His Father, and He adds, "I will give to him the morning star" (Revelation 2:28). And Peter says, "And we have the prophetic word made surer, to which ye do well taking heed (as to a lamp shining in an obscure place) until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). The "Star" arises in the hearts of the saints, so the lit word of Jesus to the assemblies is, "*I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star*", and the immediate response is, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Revelation 22:16,17). Jesus as the bright morning star is in the hearts of His saints, so that all that He will be as in glorious ascendancy when He comes is already here in the affections and testimony of those who love Him. His coming will bring into public view what has place already in His saints. It is in that sense, as I understand it, that the Star comes out of Jacob. We read, "When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). He is already the life of His saints, but this will be manifested publicly when He appears.

The Star coming out of Jacob, and the Sceptre rising out of Israel, sets forth that it is Christ as He is known now in the hearts of His saints who is coming quickly to introduce the day and to reign. These four parables thus all bring out what is divinely wrought in the saints, and the fourth is the climax, for it teaches that God is now putting into the souls of His people by the Spirit what will mark the coming day. Indeed, it is written, "for all ye are sons of light and sons of day; we are not of night nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Paul's great delight as to his beloved Philippians was "that he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day", and he would have them to be "pure and without offence for Christ's day, being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise" (Philippians 1:6; Philippians 1:10,11). The divine thought is that every moral feature of "the day" is to be brought to completion in the saints now, so that "the day" will extend universally what has been already made good in the saints.

The "Star" is the Lord viewed as coming to be the crown of all that has been in the hopes of the saints by God's work. It will bring into public display all that has been cherished by them. What Christ will be as the "Star" and the "Sceptre" is being formed in the saints now, so that it will come out in "that day" as something previously known. The Lord will make manifest the counsels of hearts (1 Corinthians 4:5). God has pleasure in working so that every moral feature of the day of the Lord and the day of Christ may characterise His people now, so that they may all be here in testimony before they are here in display. It will be God's pleasure to call attention to it in that day as having had a place previously in His "Jacob" and "Israel" so that it can be said to come out from thence. It is in keeping with this that we read, "Jehovah shall send the sceptre of thy might out of Zion" (Psalm 110:2). The sceptre is owned first in Zion, and then its rule in might goes out far and wide from that centre. This is, in principle, what God is bringing to pass in the assembly today. It shows the extraordinary character of the present work of God in His saints. It was said of old, "The sceptre will not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh come" (Genesis 49:10). There will be a witness here of the royal rights of Christ until He comes to take them up personally; that witness is now maintained in the assembly. The day is coming when with a sceptre of iron Christ will dash in pieces all those who have set themselves, and plotted together against Him (Psalm 2). Then will follow that glorious reign of which it is written, "a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions" (Psalm 45:6,7). His companions are those who have moral qualities like His, acquired through divine working in the time of His reproach and rejection.

When Christ appears the things represented by Moab, Edom, Amalek and the Kenites will all come under judgment. Moab represents the pride of man (Isaiah 16; Jeremiah 48); Edom, the wisdom of man, rendering him independent of God (Jeremiah 49:7; Obadiah 8); Amalek the inveterate opposition of man to what is of God; for "the hand is on the throne of Jah" (Exodus 17:16); the Kenites — "Firm is thy dwelling place, and thy nest fixed in the rock" (verse 21) — seem to set forth the disposition of man to seek security and comfort here, like the earth-dwellers of the Revelation. Balaam, in his closing parable (for verses 23,24 are a kind of appendix) is made to say, "Alas! Who shall live when God doth this?" (verse 23). It reminds us of the word, "all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him" (Revelation 1:7). Everything that constitutes the life of man as under sin will be brought low. But by the work of God in His people the judgment of that day is anticipated, and the saints are brought to judge these things now. Indeed, it is only as

Moab and Edom and Amalek and the Kenites are brought under judgment with us that we do live. God's disciplinary ways help us to this end, and there seems to be a hint of this in the mention of Eber being afflicted (verse 24). This supplementary parable seems added to show that God not only acts in the judgment of what is contrary to Him in the world, but He acts in government and discipline with a view to the furtherance of His work in those whom He designs to bless. We see that a maritime power will afflict Asshur. Asshur had been at one time the rod of Jehovah's anger to chastise His people, and in their turn they had been punished by Him. But I conclude that the affliction mentioned here will be used to bring about exercises in Asshur which will result in his being blessed and coming to light as the work of Jehovah's hands (Isaiah 19:25), notwithstanding his former history. And the affliction of Eber intimates that those who are directly in the line of promise and blessing have to suffer under God's disciplinary ways for their profit, and with a view to their partaking of His holiness. His work *in* His people is always accompanied by, and furthered by, His disciplinary ways *with* them. He may, and often does, use wicked men to discipline His people, but *their* end will be "for destruction", while the saints will be manifested as divinely prepared for glory.

NUMBERS 25

Numbers 25

Repeated attempts to bring a curse upon the people of God having utterly failed, the enemy changed his plan of campaign. If Balaam could not *curse* he would seek to *corrupt* (chapter 31:16), and this has often proved to be a more successful device. "The daughters of Moab" became an ensnaring influence, and "they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods" (verses 1,2).

The friendliness and invitations of the world are more to be feared than its curses. And it must not be supposed that it is only young believers who are exposed to this snare. For it comes in at the end of the wilderness, as acting upon those who have, typically, made a good deal of spiritual progress, and who have known something of the good of the indwelling Spirit, both for inward satisfaction and as power to get the victory over enemies. The fact that persons have come distinctly into view as subjects of divine working makes it a definite object with Satan to seduce and corrupt them. And sometimes it becomes sorrowfully manifest that those who have successfully resisted persecution fall before what appeals to fleshly gratification. How often the friendliness of the world, and even an appeal to the lowest lusts of the flesh, have succeeded in casting the people of God down from their excellency! It is not to little children, but to young men — who are strong, and who have the word of God abiding in them, and who have overcome the wicked one — that the warning is addressed, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world" (1 John 2:15).

"And Israel joined himself to Baal-Peor" (verse 3). Satan uses things which appeal to our flesh, but his real object is to get something which is of himself into the place which God should have in the hearts of His people. His effort is to bring us under the influence of what is idolatrous. The beginnings of unfaithfulness can be detected if we observe how our soul's relations with God are being affected. Satan will, of course, seek to blind us as to this, but the mercy of God will not leave us without warning. Let us always be prepared to deal honestly with our own souls! When we try to persuade ourselves that there is *no harm* in this or that, it is generally because there is some inward consciousness that the things in question are not so harmless as we would like to suppose them to be. Let us ask ourselves honestly, Are the things to which we are turning likely to increase our delight and liberty in private prayer, our love for the Scriptures, our pleasure in the company of spiritual persons, or our habitual experience of nearness to God? If not, let us take warning in time, and "flee from idolatry" before it has fully accomplished its deadly work

in our souls. Let us watch the beginnings of idolatrous influence, the first movements of departure. Let us pray with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any idolatrous way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23,24 margin). How many who once walked in the Spirit have now "joined themselves to Baal-Peor and ate the sacrifices of the dead"! (Psalm 106:28).

It is to be noted that the Midianites were descended from Abraham (Genesis 25:2), so that they represent the influence which those naturally kindred to us may have to draw us into worldly associations. "They invited the people". It is not always safe to respond to invitations. In writing his first epistle to the Corinthians Paul says, "But if any one of the unbelievers invite you, and ye are minded to go" (1 Corinthians 10:27). He does not commend their going, but he does not forbid it; he leaves them at liberty, and Christianity is a system of liberty, not bondage. It may be that in their carnal state they were hardly prepared for the complete separation which should mark a people among whom God walked. But in the second epistle, when evidence of self-judgment had appeared in them, he enjoins upon them to "come out from the midst of them, and be separate, saith the Lord, and touch not what is unclean, and *I* will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Holiness cannot be maintained without separation, and if holiness is not maintained some form of idolatry is almost sure to be present.

Worldly and idolatrous associations call for stern measures; they are a provocation of the Lord to jealousy (1 Corinthians 10:22). "And Jehovah said to Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up to Jehovah before the sun, that the fierce anger of Jehovah may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel, Slay every one his men that have joined themselves to Baal-Peor" (verses 4,6). It is in keeping with this that the Lord presents Himself to the assembly in Pergamos as "he that has the sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 2:12). He says of that assembly, "thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, to eat of idol sacrifices and commit fornication". And He adds, "Repent therefore: but if not, I come to thee quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of my mouth". This shows clearly that what happened to Israel in Shittim has its counterpart in the Christian profession. And the references to Balaam by Peter and Jude (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11) confirm this. Idolatry takes a more veiled and subtle form in the Christian profession than it does in the heathen world, but it is not less offensive to God. Whatever tends to entangle the people of God in worldly associations is in direct opposition to the truth. For the Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the

world, but I have chosen you out of the world, on account of this the world hates you". And James says, "know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" It is very solemn to think that there are professing Christians who *hold the doctrine* of Balaam. They are not only worldly in practice, but their *teaching* has the object of ensnaring those who are professedly God's people in that very world out of which He would have them delivered. Against all such the sharp two-edged sword of the Son of man will assuredly make war. They are definitely His adversaries, and will be treated by Him as such.

One can understand in the light of this how dreadful it was that a man of the children of Israel should come and bring "a Midianitish woman to his brethren, in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of the whole assembly of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the entrance of the tent of meeting" (verse 6). "The whole assembly" were weeping as feeling that they had come under divine displeasure, but one of the princes openly slighted the solemn exercise of the moment. And it is said that he brought the woman "to his brethren", indicating that his act involved them all. I wonder if Christians who go to worldly entertainments and read novels consider that they are identifying all the brethren with these things? I am afraid this is often forgotten. We think it is our own matter, and that it affects nobody else! But if I am one of the people of God I really identify them all with what I do. My worldly conduct tends to corrupt the whole testimony of God. What a solemn thing this is!

No wonder that the sight of such a thing, and the thought of how it involved all the brethren, moved the soul of Phinehas with a divine jealousy. He "rose up from among the assembly, and took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent-chamber, and thrust both of them through" (verses 7 and 8). Jehovah said of him, "he was jealous with my jealousy ... he was jealous for his God" (verses 11,13). It was no time for lukewarmness or half-hearted measures. Twenty-four thousand had already died of plague in one day. Atonement must be made; in this case by the execution of suitable judgment. Phinehas maintained what was due to God in priestly righteousness, and the judgment executed was accepted by God as making atonement for the children of Israel. We have seen that many may be involved in the consequences of one transgression, but it is a comfort to see, on the other hand, that many may benefit by the righteousness of one. This is true pre-eminently of that one righteousness wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also true in principle of any who act in faithfulness to God in regard of what is due to Him. Every act of righteousness in maintaining what is according to the truth has a beneficial bearing on all the people of God. The judgment of what is evil has necessarily the aspect of severity, but it is really

the only ground on which God can go on in His goodness with His people. It can thus be regarded as making atonement and averting a judgment which would otherwise be inevitable. God takes account with pleasure of a holy refusal of what is displeasing to Him, even though it may only be found with a small remnant of His people. And the fact that what is evil has been judged in this way is of more importance before God, and perhaps of more benefit to the whole of His people, than we are apt to think. Faithfulness to God in judging what is displeasing to Him is the truest love and benefit to all His people. The uncompromising decision of Phinehas, who would not suffer worldly and idolatrous associations, made atonement for the children of Israel, and all benefited by it. It also secured to Phinehas Jehovah's covenant of peace, and the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, so that we find from Ezekiel that his descendants will exercise priesthood in the millennium. If there is the absence of faithfulness in what is due to God there cannot be true holiness, and without holiness no man shall see the Lord; true priestly service will cease.

We do not read of Phinehas as exercising priesthood in a sacrificial or intercessory way; he was a warrior priest. When Jehovah would have His people avenged upon the Midianites, Moses sent twelve thousand armed for war, "and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest and the holy instruments even the alarm-trumpets in his hand" (Numbers 31:6). And afterwards when the two and a half tribes built "an altar of grand appearance" by the Jordan, and it was regarded as a movement of rebellion against Jehovah which called for severe judgment, Phinehas was sent with ten princes to call them to order. And then, again, when appalling wickedness in Israel called for punishment, and the children of Israel enquired of Jehovah what they should do, we are told that Phinehas stood before the ark in those days (Judges 20:28). He must have been an old man then, but he still appears in a militant connection, and acting in it in faithfulness to God. When evil is occurrent the holy priesthood must necessarily assume a militant character. People speak sometimes of the "church militant", and it would be well if the church generally was more worthy of such a designation. It is most essential that we should be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ". It is only such who really have God's covenant of peace. There are times of testing in the history of most believers when it becomes imperative to take immediate and decisive action in a military sense. If they fail to do so, they succumb to an influence which is really evil and idolatrous in its tendency, and they give up what is due to God in the circumstances of the moment. This is very serious, because it involves coming under God's governmental displeasure. Paul reminds us of the many thousands who fell in that day of ensnarement, and he adds that "all these things happened to them

as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10:8; 1 Corinthians 10:11,12).

It is instructive to know that Phinehas filled another office which is not mentioned until long after. When the door-keepers are spoken of in 1 Chronicles 9, we are told that "Phinehas the son of Eleazar was the ruler over them formerly; Jehovah was with him". I suppose he was the first to bear the charge of door-keeping in regard to "the tent of meeting". It was a holy trust to keep watch "at the gates of the house of Jehovah, the house of the tent". This conveys to us a very clear intimation that vigilance is to be exercised in regard to those who are allowed to approach "the tent of meeting". It is to us a commandment of the Lord. There is no thought in Scripture of spiritual privileges being open to anyone who chooses to take them up. Entrance to the tent of meeting, or afterwards to the temple, was never left to the responsibility of those who wished to enter. From the very beginning of God having a place where He might be approached by His people there were door-keepers. At a later period we read that "David and Samuel the seer had instituted them in their trust", or, perhaps, as the margin reads, "had appointed them on account of their faithfulness" (1 Chronicles 9:22).

As ruler over the door-keepers we are told of Phinehas that "Jehovah was with him". No doubt he was as jealous for God in regard of those whom he admitted to the tent of meeting as he was jealous in killing Zimri: We have to deplore that there has been great lack of this holy watchfulness in the Christian profession; the door has been left unguarded, and much that is worldly and carnal has got in. This state of things brings an obligation upon all who wish to be faithful in the last days to act upon the word, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). If Christian fellowship is to be taken up in a divine way in the present condition of things it can only be as we "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). To maintain such a position as this there must be vigilance in door-keeping. Something of the spirit of Phinehas is needed. We may be sure that under his rule there would be no likelihood of laxity in the admission of unsuitable persons. Phinehas would consider first for God; his first concern would be that all should be suitable to the place where Jehovah dwelt in holiness. It is well for those who have the trust of door-keeping — and all believers have this responsibility in some measure — to remember that Phinehas was the ruler over the door-keepers, and that "Jehovah was with him" in discharging that trust. We may surely have confidence that if we are truly minded to be faithful in this service of watchfulness at the doors — faithful to admit all who have suitable moral and spiritual qualifications, and faithful to refuse what is not in

keeping with the truth, or with the holiness which becomes God's house — He will be with us as He was with Phinehas.

NUMBERS 26

Numbers 26

The numbering of the whole assembly in this chapter has in view their entrance upon the inheritance. And Jehovah Spoke to Moses, saying, "Unto these shall the land be divided for an inheritance according to the number of the names; to the many thou shalt increase their inheritance, and to the few thou shalt diminish their inheritance; to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him" (verses 52 - 54). So that, from this point onwards, the inheritance is directly in view as being much before the mind and heart of God for His people. It is very important that we should apprehend this great divine thought and purpose. The inheritance was a very definite thing before Israel, but as presented to us in the scriptures we are reading, it was typical of a much greater inheritance of a spiritual nature which can be known and enjoyed today. There is a vast range of spiritual blessing in Christ which God has in mind for His people to possess and enjoy today. It was proposed to us in the glad tidings which God sent to us by His chosen servant Paul, for he was sent to the nations "that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). We have all been very interested in the first part of this great commission; but what about the second part? I have no doubt that God is more interested in the inheritance which His love would have us to enjoy than He is in the forgiveness, essential as the latter is, if we are to have any happy relations with Him at all. How repeatedly we are spoken of as "heirs of God", and "heirs through God", and Paul could say, "In whom (that is, in Christ) we have also obtained an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11). The teaching of the latter part of the book of Numbers is helpful in its bearing on this.

The prominence given to *families* in this chapter is very noticeable. Families were mentioned in connection with the first numbering of the people (chapter 1), but they were not particularly specified. In this chapter they are specified by name, suggesting that in view of entering upon the inheritance the family idea acquires prominence. The first numbering was a military numbering, for in connection with each tribe, going forth to military service is mentioned, but in this chapter, while going forth to military service is once mentioned, it is not repeated as in chapter 1. It is much more a *family* numbering here, which is confirmed by the fact that certain "daughters" are mentioned. The daughters of Zelophehad had no military status, but they had family status. Zelophehad did not contribute one soldier to the armies of Israel, but that did not hinder his daughters from inheriting family-wise. This suggests that, while military service may be requisite to gain or to hold the inheritance, the enjoyment of it

is in family conditions. It is an exercise for us as to how far such conditions have developed in our souls under divine education in the wilderness? The discovery of what the flesh is, the learning of God's faithful and forbearing love, the grace of priesthood, seeing how sin in the flesh has been condemned, giving place to the Spirit as the springing Well, are all designed of God to lead to the development of a family character of things amongst His people. So that they may move more together, and get closer to each other in affection. Such conditions are very favourable to the enjoyment of the inheritance.

John's first epistle views the saints in family character — children of God, walking together in love as brethren. As such conditions are present with us we shall get an increasing consciousness that we are bound up together in affection for the common enjoyment of the inheritance. We shall find delight in sharing with the brethren their spiritual prosperity, and in seeking that they shall share ours. If the spirit of the miser and the hermit is with us we shall not prosper. The miser hoards up, but what he gets in the meetings, or from reading, is unproductive because he does not share with others. Then the hermit isolates himself; he thinks he can do without meetings or ministry; the brethren are not a necessity to him; he is self-sufficing. But that is a long way from the family spirit. Such cannot really enjoy the inheritance.

It is exercising to see that in the period covered by this book five of the tribes had diminished in number, but we may also observe that seven of them had increased. The greatest decrease was in Simeon, who had apparently suffered severely from the Midianitish snare of chapter 25. It was a prince of Simeon that Phinehas had to kill for his unfaithfulness, and if a prince were susceptible to such a snare it is likely that his tribe was influenced in the same way. The greatest increase was in Manasseh, in which tribe there had developed much desire to have and to hold the inheritance. The daughters of Zelophehad come before us as having great interest in the inheritance, and the chief fathers of Manasseh had a great interest in it, too, from a different point of view (see chapters 27 and 36). This seems to intimate that enlargement in family character and appreciation of the inheritance go together. It is well for us all to face the questions which are thus raised. Are we increasing or diminishing? The great general principle which governs the distribution of the inheritance is, "to the many thou shalt increase their inheritance, and to the few thou shalt diminish their inheritance" (verse 54). The more developed we are in family character the more we shall be enlarged for the possession and enjoyment of the inheritance. This is a very important truth, and it has a very practical bearing.

God being made known as the Father — and it is by this Name that the Son has made Him known — gives character to this present time of infinite grace, but there is also bound up in it a clear indication that the family thought has a great place with Him. The assembly of the Thessalonians was “in God the Father”; they were an assembly of young believers, but as being in God the Father the family spirit was there. Paul had no need to write to them concerning brotherly love; he says, “ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. For also ye do this towards all the brethren in the whole of Macedonia”. So that while the family spirit is developed in localities it is not limited to the localities where it is developed; it goes out in a general and even universal way. Paul had heard of the brethren in Colosse and at Ephesus that they had love towards all the saints. It is in such conditions that the inheritance can be enjoyed.

Another great principle is introduced in verse 55. “Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot; according to the names of the tribes of their fathers shall they inherit; according to lot shall his inheritance be divided to each, be they many or few in number”. This brings in the thought of divine sovereignty assigning certain boundaries which are not to be over passed. Each tribe has its allotted place, and has to keep its bounds. The “tribes” represent the saints as in assembly order, which brings in divine regulation. For the enjoyment of the inheritance it is essential that this should have its place as well as the family thought. We are all on common ground as the children of God, and as brethren, whatever differences there may be in growth. But in the assembly we have to recognise, and to be subject to, a sovereign distribution which is always to be regarded. In the first place, we are set in localities, and we have to take up our assembly privileges and responsibilities in those localities. Then another thing which has been sovereignly determined in divine wisdom is that there is a difference between the man and the woman. The woman is to be subject,

and to be silent in the assembly; she is to cover her head when she prays or prophesies, while the man uncovers his. In the family character of things, and in purely spiritual relations, she is on equality with the man, but in the assembly she must observe the order which God has instituted there.

Then in 1 Corinthians 12 we see that there is a sovereign distribution of gifts and spiritual endowments. “But all these things operates the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular as he pleases” (1 Corinthians 12:11). This corresponds with the principle of dividing by lot. We read, further, “And God has set certain in the assembly; first, apostles; secondly, prophets, thirdly, teachers; then miraculous powers; then gifts of healings; helps; governments;

kinds of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28). All these are sovereignly set in the assembly; they belong to its divine order and equipment. The gifts of the ascended Christ in Ephesians 4:11 — apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers — are also distributed in sovereignty. What is brotherly, and connected with the family setting of things, must not be allowed to set aside or weaken what is distinctive in God's assembly ordering. If the inheritance is to be enjoyed there must be the full recognition of what is sovereign in the bestowal of special gifts. The family character of things is never to set aside, or bring confusion into, the divine order of the assembly.

The inheritance is so vast that nothing less than "all saints" could fully occupy it. The blessing in Christ is taken up in detail by each one according to the measure of grace and faith bestowed, and it is taken up tribally in local assemblies where divine order is observed, and those assemblies are all unified in the recognition of what pertains to the assembly universally. The gifts sovereignly set in the assembly universally,

and ministering for the good of all, practically preserve unity in truth and practice with a view to "all Israel" enjoying the God-given inheritance. Though taken up in detail, as we have said, by each one who has part in it, it becomes available for the good of all. What each one has is brought into the common wealth so as to be for the joy of all. For what each one has of the blessing in Christ is to be held as the portion of all, and made available, so far as grace is given, for the profit and joy of all.

NUMBERS 27

Numbers 27

The daughters of Zelophehad were concerned to inherit family-wise, that their father's name should not be taken away from his *family*, because he had no son. They said, "Give unto us a possession among the brethren of our father" (verse 4). They stood for the principle of inheriting family-wise, and showed in this that they prized the inheritance. "And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right; thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them. And unto the children of Israel shalt thou speak, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. And if he have no daughter, ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. And if he have no brethren, ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. And if his father have no brethren, ye shall give his inheritance to his kinsman that is nearest to him in his family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of right, as Jehovah commanded Moses" (verses 6 - 11). The *brethren* and the *family* are prominent as determining this "statute of right".

But in chapter 36 the chief fathers of Manasseh stood for the principle of maintaining each tribe's inheritance in its integrity as distributed by lot. Some are inclined to make the family principle everything. But it is as essential to inherit in tribal character as it is to inherit family-wise. Indeed the holy affections and mutuality that belong to family relations will only be safeguarded and developed as we respect the divine ordering and sovereign distribution which pertains to the assembly. The five daughters of Zelophehad secured an extended territory to Manasseh. For "there fell ten portions to Manasseh, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which are beyond the Jordan. For the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance among his sons" (Joshua 17:5,6). But they had to recognise that they held the inheritance subject to the limitations which divine sovereignty imposed. They had to own that there was a tribal order which they must not transgress; they were not at liberty to do as they pleased in Israel. They could only hold the inheritance family-wise as they respected the tribal assignment of it by lot. The lesson of this for us is that we must accept the divine order which is set up, and which is to regulate things with particular reference to how we walk together in local assemblies. "If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

The leadership under which the inheritance can be possessed, and the conditions in which it is exercised, are next brought before us. Moses and Aaron were disqualified, as we have seen in chapter 20, by failing to hallow Jehovah at the waters of Meribah. But Moses accepted this in a beautiful spirit; his only care was for "the assembly of Jehovah". "Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the assembly, who may go out before them and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in, that the assembly of Jehovah be not as sheep that have no shepherd" (verses 16,17). Moses appealed to Jehovah as "the God of the spirits of all flesh" — a touching reference to God's universal consideration for men as His creatures, and His care in faithfulness, His readiness to provide for all. Moses thought of what was true of God in His universal providence, but he used it as a plea that the special need of Jehovah's assembly might be met in divine goodness. We are told that He is the "preserver of all men, specially of those who believe". If Jehovah held a relation to all flesh which was beneficial and providential, surely He would not fail to provide shepherd leading for His assembly! How completely had Moses changed his view-point from the moment when he said, "Ye rebels"! He has got over to the side of the unfailing faithfulness of God. Everything is to be the outcome of that. They had, as a matter of fact, owed everything to God's faithfulness in the wilderness, when "for a time of about forty years he nursed them in the desert" (Acts 13:18). He had "carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9). Moses now counts on the same faithfulness to provide suitable leadership to bring them into the land.

We may gather from this that as the inheritance comes into view, and our entrance upon it, the necessity arises for us to learn Christ in a new character. Moses represents His authority as Lord, as known in the wilderness, but Joshua sets Him forth as the Leader of God's people into the land. The honour that God had attached to Moses was to pass over to Joshua, for Moses was to lay his hand upon him, and to put of his honour upon him,

so that Joshua is identified with Moses as setting forth the same blessed Person, but in a different character. The thought of authority is not dropped, but leadership becomes more prominent, and this as having shepherd character. The leading out and bringing in which are referred to remind us very much of how Christ is presented in John 10, where He leads His sheep out, and goes before them, and says of those who follow Him, "I give them life eternal, and they shall never perish" (John 10:4, 28). He leads out from the Jewish fold, representing earthly religion, and goes before His sheep through death and resurrection to lead them into life eternal, which is the anti-type of the land of Canaan. Moses brought the people out of Egypt, but it is Joshua

who leads them into the land, and who leads them in the land when they get there. Every true believer must have known the Lord as the anti-type of Moses, but we have also to learn Him, and to follow Him, as Joshua. There will be no entrance into the land otherwise. It is only a risen and heavenly One who can lead us into a spiritual region which lies beyond death.

Jehovah speaks of Joshua as "a man in whom is the Spirit" (verse 18), and it will be remembered that Jehovah said of Caleb — who was Joshua's faithful companion in searching out the land and bringing a good report of it — that "he hath another spirit in him, and hath followed me fully" (Numbers 14:24). Joshua having the Spirit in him would indicate that it is in the power of the Spirit that Christ leads into that region of spiritual blessing where eternal life is known and enjoyed. But Caleb having "another spirit" in him shows how God can bring about in His people a state which appreciates that which is spiritual. It is evident that there was in each of these favoured men a high appreciation of the "very, very good land" over Jordan. They followed Jehovah fully in the thoughts of His love for His people. So there was a moral suitability in Joshua being selected to lead the assembly into the inheritance, and to be a type of Christ as the One who leads His flock into life eternal. The Spirit being in Joshua intimates to us that the Spirit holds a special place in relation to life eternal; it is as we sow to the Spirit that of the Spirit we reap life eternal (Galatians 6:8).

Life eternal is known and enjoyed in a spiritual region, entirely outside the life of the world, and our Joshua leads into it, and moves in it, as Himself having the Spirit in which it can be enjoyed. But "the whole assembly" were to be *with* Joshua (verse 21) — all identified with him, so that whether they went out or came in, they were to move *with* him. It is obvious that to move with one in whom was the Spirit, they would need to have the Spirit too. It was only as typically in their case, but in the anti-type it is actually so. The same Spirit who is in Christ as the Leader for the inheritance is in "the whole assembly", viewed as following Him and identified with Him. And nothing less than this is in the mind of God for all His people today. Joshua in this character was to be set "before the whole assembly" (verses 19,22). This presentation of Christ is for "the whole assembly" today. God would have "the whole assembly" to know Him as the true Joshua, and to move after Him, and with Him, as the great Leader of salvation — salvation in the positive sense of being brought into what is in God's mind and heart for His people, a present heavenly joy as in the land.

The word is to be noted, "thou shalt set him before Eleazar the priest ... And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall enquire for him, by the

judgment of the Urim before Jehovah" (verses 19,21). This association of the Leader with the Priest is very instructive, as indicating how the two offices of Christ stand in relation to each other in the mind of God.

"The whole assembly" was represented in a priestly way in Eleazar, and the Urim in the priestly breast-plate gave light as to God's present mind for that assembly. The Leader was ever to stand before the Priest, and to move as instructed by Jehovah in answer to priestly enquiry. The sense of waiting upon God, and enquiring, and receiving direction, was always to be present with Joshua. In applying this to the Lord we must not forget who He is as to His Person, and we must also remember that He is the Priest as well as the Leader. How many types it takes to bring out all His offices and His glories! But his receiving light from God for His people may be illustrated by the opening words of the Revelation. "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to his bondmen what must shortly take place". That book is like "the judgment of the Urim" — divine light thrown upon all that is occurrent in the assemblies, and that will be occurrent in the world before Jesus comes, and after He comes, but it is all presented to us as communicated by God to Jesus Christ, that He may show it to His bondmen. As Priest the Urim is always in His breast-plate — the divine judgment and estimate of things; and as Leader He moves before His people, and would have them to move with Him, as in the light of that priestly judgment. He goes first in every spiritual movement. This is one part of His great service in relation to the assembly, and particularly as having in view the entrance of the assembly into "the pleasant land", and overcoming the enemies there, so that the land may be fully enjoyed.

In the type we are considering, the Urim was intended to decide all Joshua's movements — the time and character of every military expedition. All the victories in the land were the result of movements in which priestly direction had its place, and the judgment of the Urim.

Such is the character of the leadership of Christ; it never leads to a wrong move in the conflicts of the testimony. We, alas! may fail to follow Him, or to move with Him, and then all kinds of blunders may be made, and the enemy get an advantage. But the divine mind is that "the whole assembly" is to know the leadership of Christ as Joshua, and to move with Him in overcoming enemies and in possessing the inheritance.

It is obvious that Joshua was not always personally up to the high level of what he was typically as a type of Christ. He was not standing before Eleazar when he listened to the spies in Joshua 7:3, or he would have had "the judgment of the Urim", and would have known of the unfaithfulness of Achan

without Israel having the humiliation of defeat before their enemies. He was not standing before Eleazar in Joshua 9:14. And this raises a solemn exercise for all who have, in any measure, the responsibility of leadership amongst the people of God. If so great a servant as Joshua could miss the direction that was always available for him, we may be sure that this has been recorded that others may profit by it. If leaders do not stand before the priest, and maintain priestly conditions in themselves, they may miss divine light at a critical moment. It is a sad thing for any of us to move without spiritual direction in our own path, but to give an unspiritual lead to others so that they are turned away from the enjoyment of what is rich and fruitful in the inheritance of the saints in light, is one of the most solemn things that can be contemplated.

Spiritual leadership has a great place in the ways of God. "Remember your leaders who have spoken to you the word of God" (Hebrews 13:7) probably refers to the apostles, who had a special place as spiritual leaders. But "Obey your leaders, and be submissive; for they watch over your souls as those that shall give account"

(Hebrews 13:17) is wider in its application, and refers to all who give a spiritual lead amongst the people of God. Such are to be recognised, according to Paul's word, "But we beg you brethren, to know those who labour among you, and take the lead among you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to regard them exceedingly in love on account of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5: 12,13). The Lord had supplied a spiritual lead at Corinth in the house of Stephanas, and in Fortunatus and Achaicus (see 1 Corinthians 16:15 - 19), but it had not been duly recognised, and a lead had been followed which was not a spiritual one. It is manifest that unspiritual persons will be likely to fail in discernment, and no doubt this accounts for many missing their way at times of crisis in the history of the testimony. A divinely given leader will be marked as one who has spoken to us the word of God; it will be manifest to spiritual persons that he stands before the priest — the levitical element in him is subordinate to the priestly. A true leader considers first for God, and he waits upon "the judgment of the Urim". If such leaders do lead (see Judges 5:2), those who follow them will move victoriously against spiritual foes; the inheritance will be apportioned according to the sovereign distribution of God; and it will be enjoyed together by His people in family relations.

NUMBERS 28

Numbers 28

The love of God has provided in Christ a wonderful inheritance for His people, but this chapter and the next unfold what is due to God from those who enjoy the inheritance. God gives richly to His people, but whatever He gives has in view His receiving from them what will delight His own heart. "My offering, my bread for my offerings by fire of sweet odour to me, shall ye take heed to present to me at their set time" (verse 2). Possession of the land results in God's people having great ability to minister to Him, and they are under obligation to do so, for there are no voluntary offerings in this chapter and the next; they are all matters of obligation "at their set time". The service of God is not to be thought of as a matter which can be taken up or left alone at our pleasure. His people who love Him gladly render the service in liberty, but it is, nevertheless, a matter of command which is not to be disregarded or disobeyed. God looks for His offering, *His* bread, to be presented to Him, *in addition* to any vows, or voluntary-offerings, or peace offerings which His people may bring (see chapter 29:39). It may be noted that there are no peace-offerings in these two chapters; so that their subject is not the communion or fellowship, of the saints, but what is due to God as *His* portion.

There is spiritual instruction in the fact that the offerings spoken of here are supplementary to what we have in Leviticus. Nearly all of them are additional to what was enjoined when the tabernacle service was inaugurated. God did not bring out at the beginning all that was in His mind; something in regard to offerings remained to be unfolded in these chapters nearly Forty years afterwards, as the end of the wilderness drew near. This is in keeping with God's later ways as we have been permitted to observe them. The whole truth was not brought out at Pentecost, nor was it all in the ministry of the twelve apostles. A great deal was added later in the ministry of Paul, and after Paul's departure a wonderful ministry was given through John, which was intended to have a special place in the revival of things in the last days of the assembly period, and to reach down to our own time. So that additional light continued to be given through Paul and John for many years after the inauguration of the assembly period. The consideration of this should prepare us to expect that something similar would take place when God in His great mercy moved to revive the truth in the hearts of His saints. Everything did not come out at once, but it came out, by the Spirit, as there was divinely-given preparedness to receive it, and as the exercises of the time gave occasion to God to unfold more fully His great thoughts as to Christ and the assembly. Everything was set out as truth from God in the holy Scriptures, but nothing was at any time

known in practical power beyond the measure in which the Spirit of God had made it good in the souls of His people. And this was a progressive process at the beginning, and it has been a progressive process as recovered in the last days, and it is a progressive process with each one of us individually. But whatever is added in this way is intended to give enlarged capability for offering to God. Those who have come in any measure into the gain of the great spiritual revival which has been going on for the last hundred years have been able to offer much more to God in the way of spiritual sacrifices than was possible before. The great enrichments of the last days are intended to yield very much that shall be "bread" for God.

The set feasts of Jehovah, as seen in Leviticus 23, are great spiritual landmarks, the import of which we have considered in their place. The instruction there lies mainly in the feasts themselves, and therefore the offerings connected with them are only specified in detail with reference to the sheaf of first-fruits and the feast of weeks, both of which refer in a special way to the present time. But the whole subject of Numbers 28, Numbers 29 is what ministers to God's satisfaction. Every exercise that God puts us through, all that He presents to us in ministry, and all that He does with us in His educational and formative ways, has in view a result for Himself, that we may have greater apprehensions of Christ which we can bring to God for His pleasure. True spiritual progress is measured by the result which is secured for God in the offerings of His people.

The basis and starting-point of all these offerings is found in the "two yearling lambs" of the daily burnt-offering. The morning and evening lamb was to be "day by day, as a continual burnt-offering" (verse 3). God does not contemplate that His people will begin or end a single day of their lives without presenting His offering. He would preserve in our hearts a blessed sense that we are before Him as identified with the sweet odour of Christ. This was "ordained on Mount Sinai for a sweet odour, an offering by fire to Jehovah" (verse 6); it goes back to the beginning as an essential feature in God's dispensation, and it is never to drop out. God's perpetual thought is that His people are before Him in the perfect acceptability of Christ, and if that is appreciated in our hearts we shall delight to come to Him continually in the sense of it, to minister to His satisfaction. This is a service not to be omitted either individually or household-wise. It is a poor Christian household where there is nothing that answers to the morning and evening lamb. And the oblation and the drink-offering are always to accompany the burnt-offering. For how could we think of Christ as being, through death, the ground of our acceptance without thinking of the holy perfectness of His humanity, and of the completeness of His self-dedication for the glory of God. The drink-offering

being poured out in the sanctuary (verse 7) shows that it represents what can only be estimated in a priestly way, outside the region of natural thoughts, in holy nearness to God. So that the morning and evening offerings are in no wise to be a formal matter, but are to be presented in a holy and priestly way for the satisfaction of God, who speaks of them as "My offering, my bread".

Then on the sabbath day there were to be two additional lambs "besides the continual burnt-offering". When God gives rest it is to yield additional "bread" for Him. The sabbath is a figure of God's rest in the world to come, but as it is already secured in Christ believers have the privilege of entering into it in a spiritual way now (Hebrews 4:3), and as they do so there is enlargement in offering to God. Then the sabbath being a weekly "set time" reminds us that, though we do not keep the sabbath, we have a special day in *our* week which is to us hallowed as the Lord's day. It is surely due to God that there should be more for Him on that day than on any other day of the week. Most of us in this country are freed providentially on the Lord's day from much that has place in the ordinary round of our everyday life, and this is a very great mercy. As owning the Lord's rights in connection with His day we should be concerned that offerings suitable to that day are presented "at their set time". There is clearly something additional which can be taken up on the first day of the week, for the believers of old assembled on that day to break bread (Acts 20:7), and this would surely be a special occasion for offering. If believers do not assemble to break bread on the first day of the week they are neglecting one of God's set times, and they do not take up their part in the peculiar wealth of offering which goes up to Him from His saints as together in assembly character. One cannot but believe that the daily offerings being presented would lead to an ever increasing sense of the importance of what is weekly as connected with the assembling of the saints. And on each such recurrent occasion additional yield for God would be forthcoming.

Then "the beginnings of your months" (verse 11) are evidently of special importance, for the offerings increase greatly. "Two young bullocks, and one ram, seven yearling lambs without blemish ... And a buck of the goats shall be offered, for a sin-offering to Jehovah, besides the continual burnt-offering, and its drink-offering" (verses 11,15). I think Scripture supposes that we have months in our spiritual history as well as days and weeks, and perhaps we need to be more exercised about this. The months stand in relation to the spiritual year, which represents the whole cycle of God's ways with us while in time conditions. Scripture speaks of an "acceptable year of Jehovah" (Isaiah 51:2; Luke 4:19); giving the thought of a complete round of seasons; and when this is seen in its fully developed form in the heavenly city we have "the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, and in each month yielding its fruit"

(Revelation 22:2). The spiritual year seems to thus bring out the whole round of what Christ is as the source of perennial satisfaction for His people in time conditions. But it is a year divided into months, for months stand in relation to the year in the same way as hours stand in relation to the day. The blessing of Joseph speaks Of "the precious things put forth by the months" (Deuteronomy 33:14). The preciousness of Christ is so vast and varied that no creature could apprehend it as a whole. What God intends that men should know and enjoy of Christ in time conditions has to be spread out over His acceptable year, so as to be known in part as each succeeding month brings it out. The moon is lighted up afresh by the light of the sun every month.

It was a wonderful "beginning of months" when Christ shone out before us as our Passover, bearing the judgment due to us, and becoming the food of our faith in that character. But that being "the beginning of months" intimates that other months will follow.

The Lord speaks of manifesting Himself to an obedient lover (John 14:21), and I have no doubt that a manifestation of Christ would introduce something like a new month in the history of the soul. Some of us have surely known seasons when a new shining of Christ came to us, and we got a taste of His fruit we had not known before! But I venture to say that none of us have had the experience yet of the whole spiritual year. There are still manifestations of Christ to be had, and fresh fruits of the Tree of life to be enjoyed. Let us not miss them by being unaffected as these precious realities are brought before us!

We see in the chapter before us that each new month is to be accompanied by greatly enlarged offerings for God. It will be observed that the monthly offerings are the same as for the feast of unleavened bread (verse 17), and for the day of the first-fruits (verse 26). These occasions are particularly typical of the present period for "the acceptable year of the Lord" is now running its course, its mighty cycle bringing into view the all-varied grace of God in Christ. The saints of the assembly are directly called upon to "celebrate the feast" of unleavened bread (1 Corinthians 5:7,8) by purging out old leaven so that the assembly may be a new lump as unleavened. And the feast of weeks sets forth what the assembly is as the present vessel of the Spirit on earth. One can understand that it is fitting that such great spiritual realities should result in there being a large portion for God. Indeed, the present time is peculiarly rich in the yield which accrues for God from those who are enjoying the inheritance.

The "two young bullocks" suggest a large and energetic apprehension of Christ as known by divine testimony in the greatness of His sacrificial

capability, so that He is brought to God in a way that, corresponds with how God has made Him known. How delightful it is to God when worthy thoughts of His beloved Son are brought to Him in the full hearts of His people! The "one ram" indicates that the people of God are able to bring to Him as an offering some true apprehension of Christ in the maturity and vigour of His consecration to God, His full devotion having been made known in death. The "seven yearling lambs" show that the saints have appreciated Christ in His perfection as the meek and patient Sufferer, who allowed Himself to be led to the slaughter, who has uncomplainingly submitted to all that had to be undergone before the pleasure of Jehovah could prosper in His hand, so that they can offer Him to God in this character. And, finally, "a buck of the goats shall be offered for a sin-offering to Jehovah", making manifest that all this comes to God from a people who cannot say that they have no sin, but who know Christ as the One who has fully glorified God about it, and who can bring Him to God in the sense that He is "bread" for God even in this character.

NUMBERS 29

Numbers 29

The feast of unleavened bread, and the "new oblation to Jehovah" (chapter 28:16 - 31), stand in relation to the beginning of the year. But "the seventh month" has the end of the year in view; (see Exodus 23:16) it refers typically to movements of God amongst His people as the end of His ways draws nigh. It is said of the first day of the seventh month, "a day of blowing the trumpets shall it be unto you". This suggests a time of special testimony as the end approaches, and while it applies directly to God's ways with Israel in a coming day, I have no doubt the Spirit had also in mind an application to God's present ways. (The reader is referred to "An Outline of Leviticus", chapter 23, for further remarks as to this). There has been in recent times a remarkable revival of the truth as to Christ and the assembly, and God looks for offerings from His people that will correspond with the special favour which He has shown to them. What is supposed to be divine service in Christendom has very largely fallen into a formal order in which there is very little that is in accord with the present mind of God, and therefore it fails to minister to His satisfaction. But He has not been content to leave matters in that state; He has given, particularly within the Last hundred years, a great "day of blowing the trumpets". I suppose every one who reads these lines has heard something of the sound of those trumpets! But Numbers 29 raises an exercise as to whether there has been a yield for God which corresponds suitably with the wonderful testimony which He has given.

God's revived testimony, and the gracious help which has enabled many to commit themselves to it in faith, has made possible and practicable many things which have been unknown almost since the days of the apostles. It has been found possible for saints to walk together locally in assembly order according to 1 Corinthians, and as functioning normally by the one Spirit to know something experimentally of what it is to be "Christ's body, and members in particular". It is still possible to hold Christ as Head, and to know the wealth of spiritual supply and direction which comes from Him. It is still possible to profit by the gifts of the ascended Christ, and by those gifts set by God in the assembly, and to find that these divine furnishings are vastly superior, in a spiritual sense, to anything that is the product of human training. But all this divine favour, this liberation from a formal order which has become Babylonish in character, is intended to give opportunity for offerings to God "for a sweet odour".

Christ as known and cherished in holy affections is typified in the "one young bullock, one ram, seven yearling lambs without blemish", and their accompanying oblation and sin-offering. The great revival of which the "seventh month" speaks is a revival of Christ in the affections of God's people, and as He is revived there is material for "sweet odour" offerings to God. It is essential that they should be offered for God's satisfaction. The clerical system is displeasing to God because it greatly checks offering; it checks the contributions which may come from any member of the holy priesthood. However gifted one man may be he is only one member of the body, and he cannot function as the other members can. Divine order would secure the utmost liberty for offering, so that it is not desirable for meetings of the saints to be so large as to practically restrict their liberty.

The offerings of the first day of the seventh month and of the tenth day—the day of atonement — are the same, which would suggest that the two days have some relation to each other. It is a matter of spiritual observation that the more fully the mind of God has come out in testimony in these last days the more enlarged has been the apprehension of the import and value of the death of Christ. Indeed, if there is one thing more than another which has characterised the revival of God's work amongst His people it is the restoration of the Lord's supper to its proper place as the divine rallying point. And every lover of Christ knows how the loaf and the cup speak of the love in which the Lord Jesus has been into death. There are depths in this as known to the assembly, and a sweetness, which transcend all types. But, not to go beyond what is directly suggested by the type we are considering, it is clear that on the tenth day of the seventh month the blood of the sin-offering of atonement was sprinkled upon the front of the mercy-seat, and seven times before the mercy-seat (Leviticus 16:14), and this became the ground on which the holy priesthood could carry on the service of God, and "the whole congregation" could be "clean before Jehovah" so as to be acceptable to Him. It is wonderful that we can now know God, and worship Him, as glorified in the Son of man. His righteousness and holiness are known through the death of Christ in the whole moral universe, while the glory of His love shines transcendent. The day of atonement brings all this into view for us, but we must not overlook that in the type it stands in relation to a time of failure and restoration. The day of atonement was instituted after "strange fire" had been offered by two sons of Aaron, and they had died before Jehovah (Leviticus 10:1,2). It came in after dreadful failure on the part of the priesthood (Leviticus 16:1,2), so that it speaks of how the death of Christ is known and valued after the priestly service has broken down, so that it stands in relation to a divine revival of things amongst the people of God. This explains why it has its place after the

blowing of trumpets on the first day of the seventh month, and why it precedes the feast of ingathering which is said to take place "at the end of the year", or "at the turn of the year". It is an intimation to us that God has all the value of the death of Christ in His mind when reviving His work in the souls of His saints, and in connection with the bringing about of that "end" which He has before Him. He would have us to see clearly that we only serve His pleasure as we understand how the death of Christ has glorified Him about that which has caused all the failure and breakdown, so that we may be on altogether new ground before Him.

We, as saints of the assembly, have humbling exercises in the last days as we think of how the assembly has failed, and of how we have failed, but God would use these very exercises to deepen our appreciation of how Christ has fully maintained His glory at infinite cost to Himself. On this ground the holy priesthood can still carry on the service of God, notwithstanding all that has taken place, and that service largely consists in speaking to Him of what His beloved Son has accomplished, and of all that His love has brought to pass, and will bring to pass, on the ground of the death of Christ.

But as we engage our hearts with how God has provided for His own glory, and for our full blessing, through the death of His Son, let us not forget to present His offering, His bread. It is much to Him that we should bring what answers to the "one bullock, one ram, seven yearling lambs", and their oblation. When Christ loved us, and delivered Himself up for us, it was "*to God* for a sweet-smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2). As we remember the Lord, and praise Him, let us not forget God's portion. All that the loaf and the cup speak of is *for us*, but what a portion God has in it — His will established, His love expressed, and both in such a way that men are brought into the divine value of these great realities! God delights that we should understand what it is *to Him* to have this brought to pass so that our souls are set in relation to Him by it, and we are rich in ability to bring His offering, His bread. Let us ever bear in mind that the Lord's supper has its place in the *assembly of God* where He dwells, and where He receives what is due to Him. If we wish to give pleasure to the Lord Jesus we cannot do it better than by offering to God. He suffered that He might bring us to God in a priestly way.

The "feast to Jehovah seven days" (verse 12), called elsewhere the feast of tabernacles, is clearly the crown of the festive year. It typifies the time when God's thoughts of blessing for a restored earthly people will be brought to fruition. Joy is a very marked feature of this feast as presented in Leviticus and Deuteronomy but here we only read of the offerings which accompany it. What God secures from His people for His own satisfaction is here the

prominent thing. It will be noticed that the number of rams and lambs is the same on each of the seven days. They represent what is unchanging — the value of Christ in death as the ground on which the redeemed are with God now and evermore (see 1 Peter 1:18,19; Revelation 5:9). This can neither be increased nor diminished; it cannot be more for one than another. God would assure the hearts of His people that at all times, and under all circumstances, they are with Him in the unalterable preciousness of that wonderful redemption which Christ has effected.

But the bullocks, as seen here, represent an offering of Christ to God in a way that may diminish, for there is one less each day of the feast. Decrease in relation to Christ cannot refer to what He is in Himself; it must indicate diminishing ability on the part of the saints to offer Him to God, and this must surely be the result of some falling off in the affectionate appreciation or apprehension of Him. The bullock is the largest sacrificial type of Christ, and it has been remarked that "the top shoot goes first". That which is greatest and best requires the most spiritual power to maintain, and therefore it is the first to suffer when spiritual vigour declines.

But the "young bullocks" do not rise above "thirteen" at the most. The bullock being the largest sacrificial animal seems to set forth the largest possible apprehension of Christ that men can have while remaining in natural bodies, and "thirteen" of them would be very nearly two sevens. So that there is not quite a testimony here to perfect apprehension. This seems to suggest that restored Israel as brought into blessing in the millennial earth will not come up to absolute perfection in their apprehension of Christ, or in ability to offer Him. The greatness and wealth in Christ will go beyond what can be taken up or offered by men. Jehovah spoke through Malachi of pouring out a blessing "till there be no place for it" or, as the margin reads, "a blessing to superabundance" (Malachi 3:10), indicating that in the day when all nations shall call Israel blessed, and they shall be "a delightsome land", they will not be equal to taking up *all* that God has given. Indeed, the diminishing number of bullocks as the seven days of the feast run their course intimates that the same wealth of apprehension or of offering will not be maintained throughout, but will decrease. If this will be so in Israel in the day of their great blessing what a salutary admonition does it convey to us! Reminding us that there is ever on our side the tendency to decline, even when there is no actual departure! A multitude of offerings may be still presented, and accepted, while in relation to the greatest and most precious divine thoughts there is steady and progressive decline. This has a warning voice, especially for those who may have had an extra-ordinary measure of favour from God such as is typified in the seven days "feast to Jehovah". It is called "the feast of

ingathering, at the end of the year" (Exodus 23:16); it is a time when what God has given in His bounty is known in its richest profusion. As seen in Numbers 29 it is the climax of His ways in revival and recovery, and yet God's portion not only falls short of perfection in regard to what is greatest and most valuable, but it is plainly seen to decrease from day to day. Shall not this move us to great concern lest a similar decline should manifest itself in our case! Shall we not take it to heart that the service of each day may be fulfilled, but with diminishing spiritual value? Much may be made of Christ, and He may be brought to God in a variety of ways which are acceptable, and yet there may be decrease! God will surely accept all that there is, and set full value upon it, but He knows well when His portion is diminishing. The number of bullocks beginning with "thirteen" intimates that the seven days of this feast typify a time when "that which is perfect" has not yet come. When the assembly is viewed as in 1 Corinthians "that which is perfect" has not yet come (see 1 Corinthians 13:8 - 12). So long as things are "in part" there will always be the possibility and the tendency to decline. The thought of this should greatly impress upon us the need for watchfulness and prayer. I believe God permits this exercise to give us an intensified appreciation of "the eighth day", which refers typically to "that which is perfect". When that which is perfect is come we shall be in unchanging and eternal conditions, in which no decline will be possible. All will subsist in the stability and permanence of resurrection and incorruptibility; the saints will have spiritual and glorified bodies; they will be in every way conformed to the image of God's Son. But the characteristic glory of Christianity is that it brings in "the eighth day" in a spiritual way even now.

No suggestion of imperfection or decline is introduced on the "eighth day"; it is simply "one bullock, one ram, seven yearling lambs". It is Christ in His own perfection; no varying measures of apprehension now, but the saints as the subject of divine workmanship are identified with Christ according to the full measure of God's eternal purpose and grace. This is what it will be eternally. That which is perfect will come; there will be no disparity at all between Christ and His brethren; they will be "all of one" manifestly and gloriously and eternally. But this is already true in the purely spiritual associations of "the eighth day", for the saints as having their part by God's election,

and by His work, in that eternal day are holy and without blame in love; they are in sonship for God's delight, taken into favour in the Beloved; they are blessed according to eternal purpose. This lies altogether outside the "seven days" during which that which is perfect has not come; it belongs to "the eighth day", when things are no more "in part", or through a dim window obscurely, but "face to face".

NUMBERS 30

Numbers 30

Moses spoke the words contained in this chapter "to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel". This suggests that God anticipated that the spirit of devotedness, of which vows are expressive, would be found universally amongst His people. We have been considering in the two previous chapters certain things which were obligatory in the service of God, but we come now to movements which are the spontaneous fruit of His grace and love being known in the hearts of His people. They are what we sing of sometimes as "the answering chord to love so rich and free". God delights in such spiritual movements; they are specially pleasing to Him. But even such movements of heart have to be subject to divine regulation, or they may run off in directions which are not in accord with the will of God.

The whole of this chapter, save one verse, is occupied with the woman who vows. But that one exceptional verse is most important, for I believe it refers typically to Christ. "If a man vow a vow to Jehovah, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; according to all that hath gone out of his mouth shall he do" (verse 2). There is nothing contemplated here that has to be prohibited or annulled. In the case of the woman who vows there may be something which is not allowed to stand, as we shall see. But in the man, as seen here, everything stands that goes out of his mouth. It refers to Christ as the One in whom the spirit of a vow has been seen in absolute perfection. He came into the world with those wondrous words upon His lips, "Behold I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me — To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:7,8). The ears prepared (Psalm 40:6) set forth the perfect *obedience* in which He undertook to do all that was in the will of God, but there was along with this a self-dedication that found *delight* in doing it, and was in the true spirit of a vow. We may see the difference between obedience and the spirit of a vow when the Lord was twelve years of age. His parents went up to the feast, and completed the days; they did all that obedience required, and the Boy Jesus was with them in this. But having done this *they* returned, but *He* remained behind in Jerusalem. There was with Him a devotion to His Father's business that detained Him; when no legal obligation rested on Him He was moved by a spontaneous spiritual impulse, the true spirit of a vow. His heart found its home in the temple; His delight was there.

Then, again, as the true Hebrew Bondman He fulfilled His full term of service, but, having done so, when He might have gone out free He took up perpetual

service on different ground. "But if the bondman shall say distinctly, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free" (Exodus 21:6). This was no obligation imposed on Him, but it was a bond taken up in the liberty of love, by which He bound Himself, and to which He is held. And we may be assured that He is fully equal to everything that He has undertaken, both in love and in capability, so that it is impossible that any part of it should fail of accomplishment. He could truly have said what another said under circumstances of great sorrow, "I have opened my mouth to Jehovah, and I cannot go back", but with this great difference that whereas Jephthah vowed rashly, not knowing what would be involved in his vow, the Lord knew perfectly what was involved in His vow, and was prepared to carry it out, whatever the cost.

All that He undertook in His love to the Father He has brought to completion. And all that He has undertaken for the assembly will be carried through without fail, whether it be His delivering Himself up for it, or His sanctifying or purifying it, or His presenting it to Himself glorious. All is viewed in Ephesians 5 as effected by Himself in the devotion of His love. He was pledged to it from the very beginning, and faith's deepest comfort and joy is the assurance that He will not break His word. However great the cost involved, He will do all that has gone out of His mouth. Hence He is called "Faithful and True" (Revelation 19:11). "If we are unfaithful, *he* abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). He is "the holy, the true" (Revelation 3:7); whatever may be the state of an unfaithful church, there is an unalterable steadfastness about everything that has gone out of His mouth, and He will surely do it.

But *the woman* who vows represents movements of devotedness as found amongst the saints, and it is very comely that there should be movements in us which correspond in measure with those blessed movements which are seen in Christ. But we shall see in the case of the woman that she is normally either "in her father's house in her youth", or she has a husband, and *her* vows only stand as they are allowed by her father or her husband. She may have her vow prohibited or annulled, and this would remind us that some of *our* vows may not stand. It is most important that any desire or purpose of devotedness which may spring up in our hearts should be ratified by our Father and by our Husband. The daughter under parental care may have reference to the saints in their individual exercises, while the wife would speak of assembly exercises as in relation to Christ as Head. It is, no doubt, possible to devote oneself in a way that springs from a real desire to serve God, but which He may not be pleased to confirm. The confirmation of a vow lies in the support which is given to carry it out. We may want to be devoted in a way of our own selection, and when this is the case there is almost sure to be a

subtle element of self-pleasing in it. There may be the thought of being or doing something great. Very often we do not know ourselves, or our true measure as vessels, and the desire to serve has mixed motives behind it. The result is that we attempt what we cannot accomplish, and we serve with effort and not in freedom. Our "vow" is not sanctioned, perhaps because we are not yet spiritually equal to it. Many a devoted servant has to be continually let down by experience of failure, or by the discovery of that in himself which is inconsistent with the place he takes publicly. The Lord may even help us in relation to the truth, or in putting it out, while at the same time He has to put us through discipline which reduces us to the point when He can give us His full support, and we can serve in complete liberty. Our "vow" has to be fashioned into harmony with what is in His mind; He will not always allow it to stand in the form which it took in our minds or hearts. But we learn eventually that a little bit which is consciously supported by the Lord is very much more than what is large and laborious without that support. Our Father or our Husband may sometimes allow things to stand, as Jehovah did with Israel's vow in Exodus 19, so that we may be disciplined in the course which we take up, and learn needed lessons. In such a case we have really, in the end, to fall back upon our Father or our Husband to get us out of difficulties which we have brought upon ourselves.

It is sad to be in the place of a "widow" or one "divorced" who has nobody to confirm her vow or to annul it. The effect is that her vow stands, not *for* but "against her" (verse 9). A "widow" represents the assembly as having lost the sense of Christ's headship after having it, and in such a position all her vows "stand *against* her". It is a, serious thing to form purposes at a distance from Christ, and in ignorance of His mind. The assembly, as holding Christ as Head, and remaining true to her wifely place, would surely never think of making a vow, or entertaining a purpose that would be in any way divergent from His mind. But, alas! the assembly, as in responsibility here, has not maintained this position. The Lord's words to the assemblies in Revelation 2, Revelation 3 make this very clear. The assembly in Ephesus had left her first love; she had got away in heart from her Husband; and if not quite in the place of a "widow" she was on the way to it. What He spoke of in Revelation 2:2,3 was, no doubt, somewhat on the line of a "vow", but it had so little value in His sight now that she had left her first love that if He came to her as unrepentant it could only be to remove her lamp out of its place. This would be to disown her publicly, and put her in the place of a divorced woman. Indeed this would seem to be the position reached in Thyatira, because the Lord addresses a remnant there, and to do so is as much as to say that there is so much unfaithfulness in the public body that He had to disown it. It is very solemn when Christ has to

disown what has professed to be His; He speaks of some whom He will have to deny. It is evident that, in such a position, any "vows" that are made will "stand against"

those that make them. They could not possibly do otherwise. One of the most solemn things in the history of Christendom is that many vows have been made which have been supposed to indicate a desire to be or do something for Christ or for God which will be found to "stand against" those who have made them. How many have made vows who did not know the value or peace of accomplished redemption, or their place in Christ. Such vows could only be fleshly and legal, and they will stand against those who have made them for they will never be able to carry them out. A vow made in ignorance of what is really pleasing to God can never be acceptable.

But while we beware of vows which our Father and Husband do not confirm and establish, and while we fully recognise the valuelessness of vows made when the "widow" or "divorced" condition is present, we must not overlook the spiritual value of a true "vow". Paul says of the assemblies of Macedonia that "they gave themselves first to the Lord, and to us by God's will" (2 Corinthians 8:5). That was a true "vow" — a collective dedication that went even beyond the hopes of the apostle. The presenting to God of our bodies a living sacrifice, spoken of in Romans 12:1, is the normal result of the compassions of God being known in an effective way in the soul. And in no saint has the spirit of a "vow" been more fully seen than in the apostle Paul. "For the love of the Christ constrains us, having judged this: that one died for all, then all have died; and he died for all, that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and has been raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). He could say that Timothy had been thoroughly acquainted with his "purpose" — that inward, steadfast bent of mind that would not be turned aside by any obstacle within or around, and which would answer in a Christian to the "vow" of Numbers 30. And Paul would have us all to be similarly set, having before us the great thoughts of God as to His people. No doubt Numbers 30: has "the land" in view, and purpose in the hearts of His people to be definitely for Him in occupying it. And this is in the mind of Paul when he says, "but one thing — forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus". He would have similar purpose of heart to be in us all. "As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded; and if ye are any otherwise minded, this also God shall reveal to you" (Philippians 3:13 - 15).

Vows in Scripture generally refer to something which the heart proposes to offer to God in special recognition of some favour from Him. So that the sacrifice of peace-offering might be a vow (Leviticus 7:16), in which case it would minister to the communion or fellowship of saints, as bringing in something that becomes the substance of common joy to "all that are clean". This enables us to see the force of such scriptures as "I will pay my vows before them that fear him" (Psalm 22:25). "I will perform my vows unto Jehovah, yea, before All his people" (Psalm 116:14,18). Energetic movements of heart Godward at the present time should always have His assembly in view, for it is pre-eminently the place where He is served, answering to the place where He set His Name of old. A vow that does not in some way enrich the communion of the assembly has not matured properly. Hence the psalmist said, "I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings: I will perform my vows to thee, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble" (Psalm 66:13,14). Spiritual movements in the hearts of God's people are not to be dissipated vaguely in any direction that we think proper; they are to result in offerings in His house, and thus, as brought to a common centre, they swell the volume of sweet odour which ascends to Him. It is not for us to talk about our vows, but to see that the saints gain something from them. The saints do not know what has gone on in secret between our souls and God, but they have part in the result when it comes out in the assembly.

Being "in trouble" has a very happy result when it leads to "vows" being uttered. We ought not to need "trouble" to prompt us to vow, but often this is the case. How often there is little thought of what is due from us personally to God until some "trouble" makes us realise how dependent we are on Him; and then the thought springs up in the heart that if He will only bring us through, or out of, our difficulties, we will bring something to Him that we have hitherto neglected to bring. How many have uttered such vows! And it is good when God gets something as a result of our being "in trouble", though this is hardly the highest form that a vow can take.

NUMBERS 31

Numbers 31

"And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel upon the Midianites; afterwards shalt thou be gathered unto thy peoples" (verses 1,2). Moses is, as we have often heard, a type of Christ as Lord, and the place which he has in this chapter suggests that under Christ as Lord God's people are brought at the end of the wilderness to execute "Jehovah's vengeance" on influences which have ensnared them in the past. Anything which has damaged the people of God in their relations with Him is a very serious matter in His sight; it is something to be avenged as a wrong done to Him and to them. We may be assured that the recognition of Christ as Lord, and true subjection to His authority on our part will secure that this comes about. We may well challenge our hearts as to whether Christ is really Lord to us, Has 1 Corinthians been acknowledged by us in any practical way as His commandment? (see 1 Corinthians 14:37). If so, we shall have very serious exercises about the influences which have long corrupted the people of God.

It was "through the counsel of Balaam" that the children of Israel had been caused to commit sin against Jehovah, and the reference to Balaam in Revelation 2:14 indicates plainly that a corresponding snare has come into the Christian profession. "Thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, to eat of idol sacrifices and commit fornication". Midian having some natural relationship with Israel made them more suitable to be used by the enemy as a corrupting influence. Balaam himself had some knowledge of the true God, and he could use the language of piety when it suited his purpose to do so, but this was made to subserve a very evil design. And the Lord has told us that such teaching as his has corrupted the Christian profession, The world as professing Christianity became a greater snare than it had been before, and its influence quickly corrupted the order of the assembly of God, and took His people away from the collective enjoyment of their most precious relations with Him.

1 Corinthians 10 may be read as a warning against the snare of Balaam, which aims at corrupting the communion, or fellowship, of the people of God by drawing them into association with a world which is essentially idolatrous. So that this form of evil had to be resisted from the beginning. But "the doctrine of Balaam" was held later, when the church had been so far corrupted that it would tolerate teaching which was altogether subversive of what had been set out as the Lord's commandment in 1 Corinthians. The assembly in Pergamos represents the church as having passed through the time of persecution seen

in Smyrna, and now so identified with the world that, as is well known, the Roman emperor convened, and presided at, one of its most celebrated councils, and its bishops became great dignitaries in the world. The assembly in Pergamos might well be said to dwell where the throne of Satan was! The world as professedly Christian was, no doubt, less repellent than it had been as heathen and persecuting, but this caused its corrupting influence to be more deadly as regards all that is spiritual in the service of God. Spiritual things were adapted to the world, idolatrous elements were brought in, and that unholy mixture began which has continued ever since.

The world can only have its own way of taking up Christianity, and nothing answers Satan's purpose better than to use what is attractive naturally and socially to draw true saints into that way. But the sacrifices to which the daughters of Midian invited the people were "the sacrifices of the dead" (Psalm 106:28), and they answer to the set forms and lifeless ceremonies in which the religious world carries on what it calls worship. "The doctrine of Balaam" is a teaching that it is right for the people of God to worship as the world worships, and to hold divine things as the world holds them, so that all that constitutes the true spiritual service of God may cease. Pergamos had those who held the doctrine of Balaam; the very teaching tended to associate the church with the world, and we know what it has led to. It has resulted in the perversion of all that is of God, and in positive idolatry. This is a most serious matter in the sight of God; it has robbed Him of what is due to Him from His people, and it has robbed His Israel of the fellowship and privileges that are divinely connected with "the tent of meeting". So that it justly becomes the subject of divine vengeance, and it is essential that it should be judged by the people of God if they are to be suitable to go over into that spiritual region which is typified by the land over Jordan. Midian is not judged outwardly and publicly yet, but it is judged morally as the saints get the mind of God about it, and this is typified in what is recorded in the chapter before us. If we come into true subjection to Christ as Lord He will lead us to judge unsparingly every corrupting influence that has operated through the long centuries of church history, Naturally we should fall under those influences, but spiritually we overcome them, and take great spoil. For we see here that, as a result of the vengeance being executed, great wealth is acquired by God's people; His priests and Levites are enriched, and there is an offering brought into the tent of meeting of distinctive character, such as we have not seen before. Any true judgment by the saints of an evil from which they have suffered will never be merely negative in result; it will always secure positive gain for them, and enlarged offering to God.

The spiritual character of this holy war is set forth by the fact that Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest had part in it, "and the holy instruments (or, instruments of the sanctuary), even the alarm-trumpets in his hand". The whole matter was to be handled in a priestly way; that is, with true consideration for what was due to God. It was not to be a fleshly contention even for what was right, but a holy movement in keeping with Jehovah's sanctuary. Phinehas had been right in his judgment of the association with Midian, and had acted with divine jealousy in regard to it, but now all Israel was to be identified with him in an act of unsparing vengeance. If we have been beguiled, it is essential that we should be brought to a priestly judgment of what has beguiled us. No doubt there is great humbling in the fact that such an exercise should have to be taken up, but, it results in saints becoming overcomers, and in the promotion of the service of God. It was the mind of God that, all Israel should definitely judge that which had previously ensnared them. It is not less the mind of God today that all saints should judge the evil influences which have so perverted the truth, and substituted a human order for that spiritual order which was set up by Paul under the Lord's authority in the assembly of God.

It is but rarely in Scripture that we find the will of God faithfully carried out in every particular by His people, and this raises the question whether we ourselves have gone the whole way in clearing ourselves of associations which damage us for the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, and for part in the holy service of God. In the execution of Jehovah's vengeance upon Midian there was serious failure, for though they slew all the males, and the five kings of Midian, and Balaam, they took the women of Midian captive (verses 7 - 9). We can hardly suppose that Phinehas was a party to this, and it called forth the wrath of Moses. "Have ye saved all the women alive? Lo, these, through the counsel of Balaam, caused the children of Israel to commit sin against Jehovah" (verses 15,16). Phinehas, as we know him from the record in chapter 25, would not have been likely to spare anything that had ensnared the people of God. The "holy instruments" in his hand would not fail to sound an alarm under such circumstances. But the people generally stopped short of fully executing "Jehovah's vengeance". This is a serious warning, because it shows that the active energy of an evil association — represented by the males — may be judged while something of its subtle and ensnaring power is still allowed opportunity. It is easier to judge things objectively as seen active in others than it is to judge subjectively the same elements as more secretly working in ourselves. There is not a corrupting influence in Christendom of which I cannot find the germ in my own heart naturally. Things may often appear to be judged publicly while the root of the mischief in our own souls is

not dealt with. The active energy of what is Midianitish is seen in formally constituted bodies of professed Christians, but it is possible to judge and leave such bodies while still yielding a good deal of place to the influence of the natural and the social in a more private and personal way. But if we spare what God would have us to judge we shall inevitably suffer from it later on. If Israel had fully executed Jehovah's vengeance on Midian they would not have had to suffer from Midian as they did at a later period. God would have His people to be fully in moral accord with what suits Himself and His sanctuary. He not only desires that they should be holy, but that they should be partakers of His holiness. This is a high standard, but who that loves God would wish to have it lowered? And, as a matter of fact, when we stop short of carrying out what is in the mind of God I believe it will generally be found that we fail in what is really most essential to the maintenance of His testimony at the moment. In the case before us the real cause of the trouble had been spared. But Moses would not suffer this.

The provision for purifying, according to chapter 19, was necessary in this case (verse 19). It is a defiling thing to touch what is evil, even though it be to judge it, and purification is necessary if the tabernacle of Jehovah is not to be defiled. The purification here extends to "every garment, and every vessel of skin,

and all work of goat's hair, and every utensil of wood" (verse 20). A great variety of "booty" was brought to the camp, but none of it was permitted to be taken into use without being purified. This was "the statute of the law which Jehovah hath commanded Moses" (verse 21), and there could be no exemption from it. Everything must go through either fire or water.

When believers are brought to judge worldly associations they always find that much spoil results. It is often like a new conversion when a believer begins to adjust himself in regard to his associations, and the influences he has allowed to act upon him. He finds immediately an accession of spiritual gain. We learn from 2 Corinthians 6, that the way to be enlarged is to separate ourselves from worldly associations. One of the most deplorable things in the Christian profession today is that it provides so much that gives social and worldly elements a place, and people are even taught that it is right to mix with the world, and help on its schemes, so that the world may be improved. But instead of the world being improved the people of God are corrupted by alliance with it.

One great result of the authority of Christ as Lord being recognised is that the question of associations is raised in the souls of believers. Midian is seen to be a corrupting influence which has damaged the testimony of God most

seriously, and in that character it has to be judged unsparingly. But it is recognised at the same time that in what answers to Midian there are many things which in themselves have spiritual value. It is in taking forth the precious from the vile that God's servants become as His mouth (Jeremiah 15:19). The world in its religious aspect has appropriated for its own enrichment and embellishment a good deal that does not really belong to it. Christianity has brought many conceptions and ideals, many standards of conduct, many features of truth, into the world that were never in it before. These things have enriched the world, and have made Christendom differ from heathendom. But they do not really belong to the world, and the people of God have to learn to take them out of the setting in which they have been found, and to purify them, so that they may be held in their true spiritual relation to God and His service. I apprehend that this is what is set forth in type in the "booty" taken from Midian. It represents what is really of God, but which has been appropriated and used in a manner which God never intended. It has now, in the hands of His people, to be restored to its right place as held for His service and glory.

But before being suitable for these things have to be purified. They have to be taken up in relation to the death of Christ, and in relation to a judgment which is in the Holy Spirit. When we are exercised under Christ as Lord to judge the social and worldly associations that have been a snare, and which have hindered spiritual progress, we learn at the same time to value more than ever the things which are of God, but which are perverted from their proper use in the religious world. For example, how common in the world are such words as "church", "priest", "bishop", "divine service", "communion", "worship", "saints" (though the last word generally used of persons long dead!). It is evident that all these words — and of course much more might be mentioned in this connection — represent things which are really of God, for we find them in Scripture. However much they may have been perverted from their true use, they are not to be discarded, but to be completely purified from the associations in which they have been found. They are to be caused to go through fire or water, so that they may be held and honoured in a way that is pleasing to God. There is an immense amount of "booty" to be found in the terms that are current in the religious world if we are faithful to judge the unspiritual associations in which they have been found, and if we seek grace to hold them in a holy way as purified from any application to man as in the flesh.

The persons and the living creatures taken from Midian represent, I think, what God has wrought in souls. Whatever has been wrought by Him is vital in character, and therefore, as rescued from what is Midianitish, it can have place

in His assembly. The great object of priestly warfare today is to liberate all that is of God from a Midianitish profession, and set it in its true place and service in His assembly. Many living saints are today deprived of their true value by being retained in worldly associations, but it is due to God that they should be delivered from those associations, and secured for service in His assembly. As this is brought about there is great positive gain for God and for His people.

The way the spoil is divided is full of instruction. Half was to be given to "them that conducted the war, who went out to the battle", and half to "the whole assembly" (verse 27). In any spiritual conflict those who bear the brunt of it will be the largest gainers. Those who went to the war got much more, in proportion to their number, than those of the assembly did, but it was an ordering of grace that the whole assembly should share with the fighting force. This seems to be in keeping with the statute and ordinance which David made after smiting the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30:24, 25). "For as his share is that goes down to the battle, so shall his share be that abides by the baggage: they shall share alike". God will see to it in His government that those who fight His battles get full compensation, but He also sees to it in His grace that the whole assembly shall share the spoil won by those battles. The overcomer in each assembly (Revelation 2, Revelation 3) gets a special reward, but we may be assured that something is secured by his valour which is available for the whole assembly if they are interested enough to take it up. There have been overcomers in our day who have fought great spiritual battles, but a share in the spoil is open to all who value it. One man may stand in a crisis, and secure what is of God, but when it is secured it is for the gain of "the whole assembly". We should never have anything less than this in our minds.

But we find that there is "a tribute for Jehovah", "a heave-offering of Jehovah", from "the men of war who went out to the army", which was given to Eleazar the priest. It represents what ministers to the direct priestly service of God, and this gives it a most excellent place, though it was apparently a smaller tribute than what was taken from the whole assembly. In-deed, what was taken from the whole assembly is not spoken of as "a tribute for Jehovah", or as "a heave-offering of Jehovah"; it is obviously on a lower spiritual level than the tribute from the men of war. In what ministers to the direct priestly service of God spiritual quality is of more importance than quantity. What ministers to the priest has greater value in God's estimation than what ministers to the Levite, though outwardly, as in this case, it appears to be much less in amount. The greatest result for God is the furtherance of what is priestly, and in this chapter it is the men of war alone who furnish this; it is the product of spiritual energy in overcoming corrupting influences.

How this would exercise us in spiritual discrimination! God would not have us to be content to know that there is something for the support of levitical service. He would have us concerned about the quality of the result for Him in relation to what is priestly. It is possible to do a good deal to further the cause of God in a general way without much concern about His priestly service. But the type before us is intended to exercise us as to relative values, so that we may learn to attach most importance to that which has the first place in the mind of God.

There is a three-fold result for God. The priest — representing the direct service of God — gets the tribute from the men of war; the Levites — representing the general service in relation to the tabernacle — get their portion from the whole assembly; while the children of Israel get a memorial before Jehovah from the offering of the officers and captains.

The offering of the captains (verses 48 - 54) comes in beautifully at the end of the chapter. Not one man was lacking through the conflict, and their hearts prompted them to bring all the gold which they had found as a heave-offering to Jehovah. In the estimation of their hearts it was due to Him that He should have all the best. No vain-glory or boastfulness was with them; they were filled with the sense that glory all belonged to God. They wanted to be before God as under cover of all that He was Himself; that seems to be the sense in which they speak of atonement in verse 50, for atonement means a covering. How blessed to be covered under the eye of God with all that in which the glory of His love is set forth!

The half-shekel of atonement money which the people had to give for the ransom of their souls, was put into the bases on which the tabernacle stood (Exodus 30:11 - 16; Exodus 38:25 - 27), and that became "a memorial to the children of Israel before Jehovah". That was a memorial of *silver* — a redemption memorial — but in Numbers 31 the children of Israel had a memorial of *gold* before Jehovah. *Gold* represents what is purely of God, but in this type it is seen as something which has been in the hands of the world, where it has been used really to promote the selfishness of man, and to enhance what is corrupting and idolatrous. Much exceedingly precious truth has been used in this way, but now, as retrieved from associations of an unholy kind, it is brought "into the tent of meeting, as a memorial for the children of Israel before Jehovah" (verse 54).

This offering of the captains was, I believe, the first of the dedicated things by which the house of God was enriched as time went on, and which were found in its treasures (see 1 Chronicles 26:26 - 28). They were the spoil of victories by which valuable things that been rescued from unholy use so as to be held

for the pleasure and glory of God. It is very interesting to see that even in the wilderness there was room in the tent of meeting for precious things to be brought in, and to have a permanent place there. This was at the very end of the wilderness, and therefore typical of the last days. Spiritual things that have been taken out of the hand of the enemies, and that have been purified by passing through fire or water, have peculiar value for God. And this is how the tent of meeting is being enriched today. What is of God has to be fought for, and taken out of associations in which it was perverted, and purified so that it might be held in a way that is suitable to God. Things thus recovered are not only precious intrinsically, but they have peculiar value as having been gained through spiritual exercise on the part of the saints, so that they become a memorial *for them* before God.

In the mind of God the tent of meeting is the treasury now of recovered spiritual wealth. The last days have been marked in many ways by increased evil, but they have also been marked by holy warfare which has secured much that can now be held, where there is faith and spiritual power to hold it, for the pleasure of God. Much that has been taken from the Midianites, and purified, is now in the tent of meeting, and it is before God as a memorial of His people. For it is to be noted that, though only the men of war actually fought for this spoil, and only the captains presented it as a heave-offering, its value was not limited to them. It was "a memorial for *the children of Israel* before Jehovah". Such was the unity of Israel before Jehovah that the heave-offering was accredited to them all. What God actually secures in a remnant of His people He loves to regard as representative of them all.

We may be sure that the twelve thousand would not think of themselves as apart from all Israel. Moses had spoken "to the people, saying, Arm from amongst you men for military service" (verse 3). So that they went "from amongst" the tribes as representing all, and when the war was over their heave-offering became a memorial for all. It is a comfort to think that any divine treasure that is taken out of the hands of the world, and purified, so as to come into the tent of meeting as spiritual substance, is there as a memorial for all saints before God. Whatever of the truth is made good in a pure and holy way so that it can be presented as a heave-offering is representative before God of what is in His mind for all His saints. It cannot possibly be sectional or sectarian, because it is of God, and it can only be taken up by a remnant as being God-given wealth which is treasured in the tent of meeting as a memorial for all saints.

How good it would be if all saints realised what treasure there is, not only in Christ at the right hand of God, but in "the tent of meeting" down here!

Thousands of God's people would be profoundly astonished if they knew how much spiritual wealth had been taken out of the hand of the enemy, and made good by the Spirit in a very precious way in the hearts and in the praises of some of their brethren. All saints are personally concerned in this, for whatever has thus become a heave-offering, and been deposited in the tent of meeting is *their* memorial before God. It is for them to be intensely interested in it.

NUMBERS 32

Numbers 32

This chapter shows that the people of God may get very near to what is in His purpose for them, and yet be diverted from it. I trust we have accepted as truth that there is a spiritual region of which the land over Jordan is a type. In the ministry of the apostle Paul, especially in his epistle to the Colossians, the truth of the saints having died with Christ and having been raised with Him is clearly presented as the mind of God. But for many long centuries this ministry was lost sight of; it could not be held by a church which had become practically an earth-dweller. If Jordan was referred to at all it was as typifying our own death, and Canaan was regarded as a type of heaven. The thought of being risen with Christ as a present faith position, and of being quickened together with Him so as to have present possession of "the land" as a spiritual region where association with Christ in life is known, was long lost to the faith and affections of the people of God. It was not even presented to them as light.

But through God's great mercy there has been a revival of Paul's ministry in these last days, and the attention of many thousands has been called to the true typical meaning of Jordan and the land. These great spiritual realities have come into view as a powerful divine attraction, but also as a searching test of the state of our hearts Godward and Christward. Because going over Jordan largely depends on the place which divine Persons have in our hearts; that is, it depends on the spiritual state which knows how to appreciate the wonderful movements of God in relation to what He has before Him for us. What was in the mind of God has now taken form in Christ risen from among the dead, and now sitting as a glorious Man at the right hand of God.

Now I think we may gather from the chapter before us that the nearer we come to these great spiritual realities the more powerful and persuasive will be the influences that tend to hold us back from the experimental acquisition of them. And perhaps nothing serves this end more efficiently than good things here, providential things which are in themselves the mercy of God, but which are not beyond death. We have often been reminded that it was not bad things that kept the invited guests from the great supper; it was things good and right in themselves, but of an entirely different order of enjoyment from what was proposed by the provider of the supper.

Reuben and Gad had judged the Midianitish snare; they could not be said to be worldly or idolatrous in their associations; but they were detained by what was providentially advantageous. "Much cattle", and "a place for cattle", were

not evil things; they represent what saints may have in a providential way here on earth. Even the providential goodness of God may become a hindrance to us spiritually if we settle down in it, and do not go on to possess and enjoy what His love has specially in view for us at the present time.

The snare of divine providence is a very subtle one, because it seems to be an excellent thing to appreciate and enjoy what we have here by the goodness and mercy of God. Indeed, it would be very sad if we were not truly thankful for God's bounty in His providential ways. But if He has something before Him for Us which is far greater and more precious, and we are detained from entering upon what His love would delight to bring Us into by these good things on the earth it is indeed a serious matter. Reuben and Gad begged *as a favour* that they might not be brought over into what had been Jehovah's objective for them since the time of His promises to the fathers. *He* had been thinking about "the land", and speaking of it, from Abraham's time. And He had said to Moses at the thorn-bush, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good and spacious land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey". But Reuben and Gad did not value the great and precious thought of God. They had seen another land which suited them and their cattle, and they asked as a favour that they might not inherit with the children of Israel "on yonder side of Jordan". It was a deliberate slighting of the divine proposal.

It is well to bear in mind that our choice in a critical moment will be determined by the character of our previous course. The children of Reuben and Gad had not been marked in the wilderness by a sacrificial spirit. If they had been bringing daily offerings they would not have had so much cattle. They had held their cattle for themselves, and the time came when their cattle had the greatest weight in deciding their course. If we hold for ourselves what has come under our hand providentially it will, most likely, sooner or later, determine our course spiritually in a way that will be greatly to our disadvantage. But if held in stewardship for God it will never hinder us in our spiritual progress.

Reuben and Gad had been favoured providentially, as was evidenced by their having much cattle, and they had also occupied a favoured place in relation to Jehovah's testimony, as encamping on the south of the tabernacle. So that they represent believers who have been specially privileged on the wilderness side, even in regard to their place in relation to the testimony of God, but who are diverted from that which has the first place in the mind of God. When they said, "bring us not over Jordan", Moses saw in their request a repetition of what had happened nearly forty years before when the spies had searched the

land. Jehovah had said of the people then, "they have not wholly followed me", but of Joshua and Caleb He said, "they have wholly followed Jehovah" (verses 11,12). Jehovah had the land before Him for His people, and He was leading on to it, and therefore Joshua and Caleb would not regard any difficulties that might seem to be in the way. They only thought of following Jehovah. God has caused us all to prove His goodness and mercy in wilderness conditions, but in raising Christ from among the dead He has moved in an altogether new and different way, and it is faith's privilege to wholly follow Him in that way. He has raised Christ from among the dead that we might be "raised with him through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead" (Colossians 2:12). If anything holds us back from taking up this faith position it really involves, as Moses said, a turning away from after Him (verse 15). If we really follow Christ we shall not wish to stop in the land of Gilead; we shall go over Jordan. We all remember His precious words, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal" (John 10:27,28). Life eternal must be "over the Jordan"; it must be beyond death. Even as the Lord said, "On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my Life *that I may take it again*" (John 10:17).

Those who follow Him get eternal life in that new sphere in which He has taken His life again.

Christ as having died and risen is completely outside life in this world; He lives outside the sphere of providences and mercies. Now God's wondrous thought is that we should know what it is to have died with Christ, and to be risen with Him. It is good to have God's care and providence in wilderness circumstances, and we should be grateful to Him for His goodness in that order of things, but let us see to it that we do not settle down there as if there were nothing further until we die and go to heaven. Reuben and Gad are a great warning to us, for they represent persons who know what it is to be justified, and in God's favour, and to have glory in hope. Such persons may be exemplary in their practical walk of piety, and have the good of much that is brought out in the epistle to the Romans. And yet they may say in their hearts, "bring us not over the Jordan" (verse 5).

Reuben and Gad definitely took ground as to their place and blessing which came short of what Jehovah in His love had purposed for them. Has this no voice for us? Is it not true that many of us do just what they did? We content ourselves with what may be known and enjoyed on the wilderness side, and we are reluctant to go over Jordan. Why should true lovers of Christ not be prepared to follow Him into the region where He lives? We may learn something of how this comes about by considering those who followed Him

here in the days of His flesh. They were naturally much like ourselves, but the Father's work in them secured an unbreakable bond between their hearts and the Christ of God. They left all and followed Him. And when He went through death into resurrection they followed Him, as they apprehended Him risen, into that new region. They had known Him as in flesh and blood, but now they learned to know Him in a new and spiritual order. As to the resurrection of the dead it is said, "it is raised a spiritual body". It is quite certain that we cannot carry the natural into that order of things, and our human hearts shrink from leaving an order of things with which we are familiar, and in which we are naturally at home, to pass over into an order of things which is purely spiritual. But the risen Lord put the link on with Himself by appearing to them in His new condition, and giving them to realise that they could be with Him as in that condition, though as to themselves they were not taken out of the flesh and blood condition. But spiritually they could be risen with Him. Not that this was brought out yet in teaching; it was reserved to Paul to do that. But vitally and experimentally they were over Jordan when they were in company with the risen One. Now the death of Christ entitles us to take the ground that we have died with Him, but this is in view of our being raised with Him, that we may live spiritually as quickened together with Him in that life in which He lives as raised from among the dead. Let us see that we do not miss this as a great spiritual reality by clinging to the natural, and by settling down in the providences and mercies that we can enjoy here under the good hand of our God. He has something for us of an eternal and spiritual order which may be entered on and enjoyed now. It is a great loss to miss it at the present time.

An extraordinary thing comes to light in verses 16 - 19, and I have no doubt it represents what is often the case with ourselves. The Reubenites and the Gadites were prepared to go with diligence armed before the children of Israel to bring them to their place, but they had no wish to inherit with them. This shows that saints may be prepared to contend for the truth of the heavenly position, and labour that others may enjoy it, without taking it up for themselves. I do not suppose that any reader of this book would accept for a moment that the calling of the assembly was earthly, or that we should take up any alliance with the world. We have been favoured with a spiritual ministry of the truth, and we are convinced that it is the truth, and we would contend for it if occasion arose. But perhaps we are all conscious that we have not followed as definitely and whole-heartedly as we might to take up as an abiding possession and enjoyment the spiritual land over Jordan. May we be greatly stimulated to move in that direction!

Moses consented to the proposal made by Reuben and Gad. If any of us deliberately prefer to stay on the eastward side of Jordan we need not expect

that God will make us go over. He allows many things to stand which come very short of what is in His mind for His people. His ways with His saints are not arbitrary; He allows things to be tested out. If we take lower ground than that which His love proposes we should take He may allow us to occupy it. If we do not want Canaan He may allow us to remain in Gilead. But we may be assured of this, that when our choice is tested out we shall be found to have suffered immense and irreparable loss. Because not even eternity will ever give us back the privilege of inheriting the land over Jordan in the way in which it can be possessed and enjoyed now. What could be more lamentable than to have to reflect, perhaps on a death-bed, that we have not appreciated, or taken up in spiritual power, the wondrous portion which the love of God would have delighted to bring us into. The spiritual and the heavenly can be known now in a way that they will never be known again. Let us see to it that we "lay hold of eternal life" in that peculiar and blessed way in which it can be known now.

NUMBERS 33

Numbers 33

This chapter is a divine record of "the journeys of the children of Israel" from Egypt to "the plains of Moab by the Jordan of Jericho". "And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys, by the commandment of Jehovah" (verse 2). It suggests that when God's people are ready to go into the land He loves to take account of the whole journey by which they have come to that point. And we may note that it is "their goings out"; all the wilderness journeys are regarded as having that character. Baptism — typified at the Red Sea — is a definite going out from the world, but all the wilderness journeys, as viewed in this chapter, are "goings out". Until we come to what is positive and permanent in connection with divine purpose, every exercise has the character of "goings out".

And all the journeys being written by Jehovah's commandment conveys that they are seen here from a divine view-point. Hence there is no reference to any failure on the part of the people, We are told that, they "went forth out of the land of Egypt according to their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron" (verse 1), and that "On the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians" (verse 3). They are seen all through this record as marked by energy for movement; it is "*their* journeys", how *they* "removed", and where *they* "encamped". God loves to put all that He can to the account of His people, and He commanded Moses to write this condensed history of the forty years to describe how they completed the whole series of movements which could be spoken of as "goings out". There are about forty encampments mentioned, suggesting the complete range of movements and exercises through which God's people accomplish their "goings out", and learn their wilderness lessons. It is happy to see that this is the last impression which God gives us of the wilderness in this book. Many of the places named here are not mentioned elsewhere, but we have here the full record of every movement. It is the past journeys of a people just about to go into the land which Jehovah had long purposed to give them. They were movements which all had, in some way, a liberating character; they were "goings out".

We must remember that there was all through, from Egypt to Canaan, an elect Israel, represented in an outstanding way by Caleb and Joshua, but which included all who were the subjects of divine working. He had referred in the first year of their journeyings to "thousands of them that love me". That was the true Israel of God, and He could view it as having gone through the

wilderness in a way which it pleased Him to have recorded. Each encampment had had its own lesson, and, without doubt, those who were really following Jehovah got some distinct spiritual gain from each. Those who have the land in view are the ones who get the greatest gain of God's wilderness ways. Actually it was the unbelief of the mass of the people that occasioned many of these movements and encampments, but Jehovah would have them all put on record as a consecutive series of movements which His people had made on their way to the borders of the land. Historically we are told very little of what transpired in the thirty-eight years from Kadesh to the Arnon. It would have been no pleasure to God to record a history of failure. But He had noted carefully how His elect people, His lovers, had been moving by definite stages all the time. He had seen how Caleb and Joshua and others had journeyed, and He would have it written as a permanent record of movements that had given Him pleasure. I believe this to be the point of view in this chapter. There is no reference here to the generation of unbelief that perished in the wilderness; it is the same "they" all through from Rameses to the Jordan. And it is not here that Jehovah led them, as in Deuteronomy 8:2, but how *they* "went forth", how *they* "journeyed" and "removed" and "encamped". There had been movements all through which Jehovah loved to have recorded.

It is a comfort to know that there can be a wilderness history in which God finds pleasure. Such a history is marked by movement, each encampment having its distinctive experience and education. We may be sure that Caleb and Joshua learned something more of God at every encampment, and having learned it they were ready to remove to the next. From the time that the tabernacle was set up all their movements had reference to it; they were the movements of the divine testimony. We are apt to think of the wilderness as a place of trials and difficulties, and a place where the flesh is tested and exposed, and also where we experience divine resources and care. All this is true, but the lovers of Jehovah would think of it above all as the place where they are privileged to accompany "the tabernacle of testimony". It has pleased God to have a testimony here, and to have His people identified with it. And this book of Numbers shows us that it is marked by spiritual movement; it requires that those who are identified with it must be prepared to journey whenever the time comes to do so. And it should be noted that the movements referred to here were collective movements. They evidently do not typify individual exercises, but exercises which we take up together as moving spiritually in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. This type will not have much meaning to us if we do not recognise that God has a testimony here, and that He would have all His people to move together in relation to it. This could not be understood when believers were nearly all held in national or

sectarian bodies. But since God has given light as to His thought of the assembly in the wilderness we can see that His mind was that there should be assembly movements there leading to increased spiritual intelligence and liberty — a progressive *going out*, the result of which would be state and competency suitable to enter into His purpose. With this in view the Spirit of God brings certain features of the truth into prominence from time to time that the saints may be exercised collectively, and may move as together in the truth. He has in mind that we should continually take up fresh exercises, and learn to view His testimony in different settings. So that the Spirit's ministry amongst the people of God will never become stereotyped; the truth will be continually coming out in a way that leads to fresh exercises, and that requires movement so that the service of God may be taken up in keeping with the light which He is pleased to give. If we took up the service of God today according to the light given at the Reformation it would not suit the present position of the tabernacle. There could be no freshness or spiritual power in it. Those who cling to it may be faithful and pious according to their light, but they are far behind the present position of the tabernacle of testimony. The spiritual outlook of the saints, and their service Godward, if it is to be really acceptable, must be according to what the Spirit of God is giving at the present time. It is certain that, according to the type, the testimony has movements,

and with every movement the whole system of divine service comes into a new setting. And we may be sure that these movements will continue until the saints actually leave the wilderness position by being translated.

A ministry in spiritual power will always lead to movement. There will be more and more a going out, not only from what is of the world and of man after the flesh, but from restricted and partial apprehensions of the truth. There will be enlargement in what is of God, and in ability to serve Him according to His pleasure. There will be the consciousness of increasing freedom from what narrows and clouds the true knowledge of God, and of getting nearer to all that is in the purpose of His love.

We have noted before that many of the types convey instruction that is specially valuable in the last days. Indeed, much of it seems to have been reserved in the wisdom of God for special help in the knowledge of His mind at the end of the church period. There was a long period of church history during which there was very little thought of moving through the wilderness assembly-wise as identified with God's testimony. The church took the place practically of a system set up in Egypt. But within the last century the divine thought of the assembly in the wilderness has been recovered, and it has been

understood by many that God would have His people to move together universally in relation to His testimony, which is our true bond of unity as the tabernacle was for the twelve tribes. Until this is realised in some measure in a practical sense assembly movements in the wilderness will not be understood. But those who apprehend the divine thought see that it involves spiritual movement, because we have to learn how the testimony stands in relation to a variety of different circumstances and conditions. Saints walking in the truth find that new questions arise which have not had to be faced before, new difficulties have to be met, new exercises as to the truth are awakened by the current ministry of the word, and we have to learn how the testimony stands in relation to these things. It is not that the testimony changes, but it becomes known to us in new settings as we move from one encampment to another. And all the time it is a *going out* from what does not fully answer to the mind of God as we acquire ability to see His testimony in relation to one exercise after another. Those in true spiritual energy would not like to miss the lesson of one encampment, and we may be sure that the encampments as a whole would give a completeness of divine instruction for the Israel of God which would bring them to full liberty and preparedness to enter the land.

In Numbers 33 the wilderness journeys are over: the people are encamped by the Jordan in readiness to pass over into the land of Canaan. But Jehovah looks back, and He sees an Israel that "went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians", and that had moved with Him through the whole forty years until they had come to the Jordan. He would have every stage of that movement recorded by Moses, for it was the history of how they had followed Him. They had been marked by movements that were in correspondence with His own. So that it is not Israel after the flesh that is contemplated here, but the Israel of divine calling, marked by energy for movement, that elect Israel which could now pass over into the land.

The typical bearing of all this is most important. God's thought is to have a people who move with Him and with His testimony, and who are prepared to take up every exercise in the way as they come to it. Not,

in this connection, the exercises of our individual pathway, but exercises which we are called to take up collectively as "in the assembly in the wilderness". These movements set forth what God has in mind for us. He would have us to move by definite stages, facing each exercise that we come to, and, when we have gained the spiritual instruction of it, ready to move on to another encampment. Those who are following divine movements will always find themselves in the presence of some definite exercise or spiritual instruction. These exercises are not to be shirked. The natural tendency is to prefer a fixed

position where we can settle down, and feel that there is no need to remove from it. Such is largely the character of organised Christianity; it does not encourage fresh and living exercises, or the energy of spiritual movement, especially assembly-wise. But in the wilderness ways of God with His people He would have them always to be prepared for movement. We are set together in relation to His testimony, and that testimony will always be in some particular setting. The Spirit will always be saying something definite to the assemblies, so that there will always be some definite assembly exercise present with those who are identified with the testimony of God. If we take that exercise up with Him we shall gain something definite which will prepare us for further movement. If we do not face the exercise that comes in our present encampment we shall be unprepared to go on, and our movement with God assembly-wise will cease. Many have journeyed to a point when some assembly exercise came in which they were not prepared to face, and from that point their spiritual progress in relation to the testimony has been arrested. It is very sad to drop out of movements which are really of the Spirit of God.

But, on the other hand, the ranks of the defenders of the testimony are constantly being recruited, just as Israel was continually added to by the birth of children. Individuals who come in at certain points come in to be identified with the testimony in its present setting, with all that has been gained by past ministry and exercise. Those who come into the ranks of the testimony today have a great advantage because they come, in a certain sense, into the good of what has been secured by past conflicts and exercises. In taking up their part in current exercises they learn to value: the great gains of the past without which the testimony could not stand where it is today. They should certainly be interested in all its past movements, but thankful to come in to the light and instruction which has been gained thereby, and understanding that it is their privilege now to take up with their brethren the matters to which the Spirit's voice is calling attention at the present time. Many earnest Christians fail to take account of the movements of the testimony, to their own great spiritual loss. This chapter should be sufficient to stimulate our interest in those movements, for it is by Jehovah's commandment they are put on permanent record.

From verse 50 of this chapter to the end of the book we have instructions which apply to the people as having passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan. They were to "dispossess all the inhabitants of the land", and to destroy all their figured images and molten images, and to lay waste all their high places. The land of Canaan is viewed here as a region which has been held by powers adverse to God and to His people. It typifies a spiritual region

in which the devil and wicked spirits have operated against what is of God. These activities in the world generally have largely taken the form of idolatry. Man naturally fears death and what may be beyond it, and he has a thought of a Power above him. But I do not think that idolatry is exactly natural even to fallen man; I believe that it is rather that Satan has intruded what is of himself into the domain that properly belongs to God. It is wickedness in a spiritual form. This is something more than men's lusts being in activity, though there is abundance of that also. But in idolatry the very thought of God is corrupted, and men are led to think of serving other beings who are positive rivals of the only true God. This belongs to a spiritual realm which Scripture clearly enables us to recognise, as, for example, when it says of Christ that He "spoiled principalities and authorities, he made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it", (Colossians 2:15). The coming in of Christ, and the Fulness of Godhead in Him, has fully exposed these great powers of evil. They have all been shown up as antagonistic to the true God revealed in Christ, and in being exposed they are defeated. All the forces of darkness are robbed of their power by divine light coming in. So for those who received Christ all those powers were seen to be "spoiled" and triumphed over. God has, as it were, taken up the challenge, and met in combat every spiritual force of evil that had darkened men as to Him, and in Christ He has prevailed over all. Now it becomes the exercise of faith and love to dispossess in a practical way all those darkening powers, so that the whole realm where they have dwelt and ruled may be held, not only for God, but for the joy and full blessing of the creature. This gives a wonderful place to the land of Canaan as a type, and throws great light on the true nature and character of life eternal as God's gift to men in Christ Jesus.

As the old "inhabitants of the land" are dispossessed by the energy of faith, the ground which they have held may be occupied and enjoyed by God's people. The whole sphere which has been occupied by the power of darkness may now be held as the portion of the saints in light. God may be known in light and love exactly in all those particulars as to which Satan has sought to darken men spiritually, and this blessed knowledge of God enriches men, and makes them divinely happy, so that they pass in spirit outside the range of sin and death, and possess life eternal in Christ as a matter of conscious enjoyment. But this great spiritual blessing is "over Jordan".

Satan has systematised darkness as to God. "Figured images" (verse 52) remind us that idolatry often finds expression in a beautiful form. I suppose some of the most renowned works of art that can be found in Christendom have an idolatrous character. Then the philosophic systems of the heathen world, which are now reviving in Christendom, have somewhat of the

character of “figured images”, for they have been elaborately worked out by the mind of man, assisted by supernatural powers. “Molten images” would represent set forms that can be quickly multiplied, and adapted to the religious sentiment in man. Everyone with spiritual vision can see that there is, in the present day, a wonderful combination of human wisdom, and human religiousness, and even human thoughts as to Christ, all blended together to secure some kind of elevation for the man who is under God’s sentence of death.

Idolatry now takes a Christian form. The Galatians had been in their heathen days “in bondage to those who by nature are not gods”, but now in observing days and months and times and years they were really turning back to what was no better than heathen idolatry. No doubt the principle of asceticism commends itself to men. But Scripture tells us that forbidding to marry, and bidding to abstain from meats which God has created that they may be received with thanksgiving, is the result of men “giving their mind to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1 - 5). In Colossians we are warned against being deluded by the persuasive speech of men; it is men who would fraudulently deprive us of our prize. But in Ephesians we are taken behind the scenes, and shown that behind men are “the artifices of the devil” — the action of principalities, authorities, universal lords of this darkness, spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. The devil is particularly active in the spiritual realm. People may not see much harm in worshipping, or praying to, the mother of Jesus, or the saints, but the power of Satan is behind it. Many think that Christians should be under the law as a rule of life, but Satan is behind this to rob souls of Christian liberty, and to rob God of the praise that is due to His wondrous grace in Christ, and of the free service which His saints can render as they move in the freedom of sonship. All such enemies have to be dispossessed.

The saints as having passed over Jordan have come in spirit and faith on to new ground, as dead with Christ and risen with Him. There is power on this ground to dispossess all that is opposed to God. As Paul says, “For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). The spiritual forces of evil are to be fully dispossessed, so that the knowledge of God, as in complete victory over them, may fill the souls of His people. This is all founded on the power of death being set aside in the death of Christ, so that the saints can pass over to the other side of Jordan, and become victorious there over everything that is adverse to God. Eternal life as the inheritance can then be enjoyed.

The land was to be apportioned "as an inheritance by lot according to your families ... according to the tribes of your fathers shall ye take for yourselves the inheritance" (verse 54). The inheritance was thus to be taken up family-wise, which answers to the presentation of things in John's writings. It was also to be taken up in tribal settings, which answers to the thought of local assemblies, according to Paul. The saints are thus set together for the collective enjoyment of the portion which divine love has allotted to them. The range of the inheritance is so vast that it takes the whole Israel of God to occupy it. Love wants all the brethren, and delights to have as many of them as possible, for the practical enjoyment together of the God-given portion in Christ. Every man's inheritance must be "where the lot falleth to him" (verse 54); each one has his place assigned in divine sovereignty—something that he can take up of the wealth in Christ, and cultivate in a personal way so that it becomes productive for his own satisfaction, and for the pleasure of God. But then, as all are "joint-heirs", there is a common participation; that is, I believe, the idea of fellowship as John presents it — a common enjoyment in family affections of what divine love has made ours. As set in local assemblies we are near to each other, and available for the joint-heirship in a practical way. The portion to which all saints are entitled as the subjects of divine calling can be enjoyed together as we move in the family affections of the children of God, and as we recognise the divine order which has been set up in the local assemblies.

This obviously puts us outside any religious order that is of man. The inheritance, in all its vast extent and wealth, lies outside the whole range of things here, for it is beyond the Jordan, and only those who "pass over Jordan" can set their foot upon it. This appears distinctly in the next chapter. But if we do not dispossess the inhabitants they will be thorns in our eyes and pricks in our sides, and they will harass us. How painful! a thorn in the eye! What can you see then? Men have thought that trained human abilities were necessary for ministry. What has this resulted in? Modernism with its bold infidelity, and its utter blindness to what is of God. Let each of us be concerned as to this matter. I suppose that many who have had some light as to the heavenly are not in the enjoyment of it as present possession. There is a thorn in the eye, or a prick in the side; something has been spared that should have been wholly dispossessed.

NUMBERS 34

Numbers 34

This chapter defines "the land of Canaan according to the borders thereof" (verse 2). The people had not yet entered the land, but it was Jehovah's pleasure that they should know definitely the boundaries of the inheritance which He was about to bring them into. In its application to ourselves we are not viewed here as in the land, but as receiving divine instruction about, it, so that we may know exactly what it is that God proposes that we should take for ourselves as a present inheritance. It is to be feared that in the minds of many believers the inheritance is a somewhat vague term which is supposed to refer to something altogether future. The thought of a portion to be enjoyed amongst the saints now is clearly presented to us in Scripture.

The glorified Saviour spoke to Saul of Tarsus of "inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me" as something which would be received by Gentiles who believed the glad tidings. And Paul gave thanks to the Father, "who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12). So that there is undoubtedly a present portion of which the Old Testament type is the land of Canaan, which is to be enjoyed "among them that are sanctified". This is not heaven after we die, but a portion in Christ which can be enjoyed now by the saints collectively, and which has definite "borders", so that it is clearly marked off from everything outside those borders. God would have us to understand this even before we enter upon it experimentally, so that this chapter is intended to be helpful to those who are drawing near to the land, but who have not yet passed over Jordan. God would have us to apprehend in a definite way what He has in mind for us. I have no doubt this is what Paul had before him when he prayed for the Colossians that they might be "filled with the full knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). Epaphras, too, had it in mind when he agonised in prayer for the same saints to the end that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). With such effectual and fervent prayers behind the epistle to the Colossians we can understand that it would give great intelligence as to the portion of the saints, and as to "borders" which must be accepted if we are to enjoy that portion. It would thus answer very definitely in the New Testament to Numbers 34.

In the first place, we see that "the portion of the saints" is "in light". It can only be enjoyed by those whom the Father has delivered from the authority of darkness, and it is clearly marked off from everything that has the character of

darkness. John's references to light and darkness are very exercising in this connection (see 1 John 1:5 - 7; 1 John 2:8 - 11). The portion of the saints is filled with the pure and holy light of God revealed in love. There can be no mixture of darkness with this; the "border" between the two is as precise as the boundaries in Numbers 34.

In God's "wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9) there is great illumination as to Christ. The epistle to the Colossians is well known to all lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ as setting forth His glories in a marvellous way. He is seen to be the Son of the Father's love, the One in whom we have redemption, and His greatness and glory shine out transcendentally. He is presented to us as the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, the Creator, the One who is before all and by whom all things subsist together, the Head of the body the assembly, the beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, the One in whom all the Fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in order to effect reconciliation. We are told that "in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily", and that we are "complete (or filled full) in him, who is the head of all principality and authority" (Colossians 2:10). In the light of this we can understand the toil of the apostle to announce Him, "admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). And we can also understand that Satan's object would be to bring in something that was "not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8) to lead the saints away as a prey. The true "portion" of saints is to be filled full in Him, and everything that takes us away from this is outside the divine "borders", and it is something to beware of. No words can express the pettiness of philosophy, or "the teaching of men" and "the elements of the world"

when compared with that glorious Person in whom the saints are "complete". It is all really "vain deceit", however learned and pretentious it may appear to be. To go outside Christ for anything, as of divine value, is to go outside the "borders" of the inheritance.

There are some very definite statements in this epistle which we do well to weigh most carefully. For example, we read, "in whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ" (Colossians 2:11). The circumcision of the Christ no doubt refers to His death, which was the cutting off as before God of everything connected with "the body of the flesh". How could Christ be "everything and in all" (Colossians 3:11) if any place were to be left for the flesh? Therefore it has been cut off in its totality in the death of Christ. There were no half-measures in God's dealing with it; no leaving of the

smallest bit unjudged; the whole "body" of it was cut off. But then this requires that believers should be brought in their minds into accord with what has been done in "the circumcision of the Christ". So that it is definitely stated that in Christ we *have been circumcised*. This is not an outward thing — "not done by hand" — but it is a great spiritual reality resulting in "the putting off of the body of the flesh". This involves a work of God in the believer by which he is brought in mind to view the whole "body of the flesh" as a discarded thing. Nothing connected with it has any value, or even any place, in that order of things in which we are to "stand perfect and complete".

Then we read, further, "buried with him in baptism, in which ye have been also raised with him through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead" (Colossians 2:12). If believers have been buried with Christ and raised with Him it is evident that, as thus viewed, they are entirely outside life in this world. It is clear that we are not actually dead and risen, but God would have us to receive these statements as light with regard to what is in His mind and will. We have not spiritual understanding of the will of God until we do so. But the next verse carries us a step further, for it speaks of saints as having been "quickened together with him" (Colossians 2:13). There is more in this than an apprehension by faith or spiritual understanding; it makes known that by the mighty power of God saints are caused to live in mind and affection as those who are capable of having a vital part with Christ in the life in which He now lives as the risen One.

That all this has a very practical bearing is evident from the question which Paul asks in Colossians 2:20. "If ye have died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as if alive in the world do ye subject yourselves to ordinances?" Ordinances apply to men as "alive in the world", but the truth is that God's saints have died with Christ from the elements of the world. How this alters the setting of everything! And the apostle says further, "If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1 - 3).

Our "borders" are thus clearly defined. The portion of the saints is really in the things above; they are the things which it is our true privilege and joy to share together. Our mind is to be on those things, *not* on the things that are on the earth. How the apprehension of this would deliver us from systematised Christianity, and from a thousand things which we must admit are not things above; for example, politics and world improvement. What is "on the earth" is outside the "borders" of the inheritance which is the present portion of the

sanctified. Such things can only now be a diversion from our true position as heirs of God.

The clear marking off of our "borders" is a matter of vital moment. Nothing has led to greater corruption of the truth than ignorance of the divinely appointed "borders". Christianity has been made publicly a system of earthly things with magnificent buildings and in which there is no provision for the enjoyment together by the saints of their present heavenly portion entirely outside the life of this world. Christians should give great attention to the epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to the Ephesians, if they would understand the "borders" in a spiritual way.

Israel, as an earthly people, will have a "border" in a coming day when they inherit the land of Canaan, as we learn from Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel 48, but their "border" will never have the amazing significance that ours has as marking off the portion of a heavenly people. It is ours to know the circumcision of the Christ in a deeper and fuller way than they will ever know it. If we are raised with Him, and quickened together with Him as risen, this frees our minds for engagement with the things above, and detaches us from the things that are on the earth. Indeed the whole teaching of Colossians 2, Colossians 3 is a fixing of spiritual "borders" — a marking off of where we have our portion and life as having received the Christ and walking in Him. It is for us to see that, on our part, we clearly mark them out (Numbers 34:7,8; Numbers 34:10), and keep within them in a spiritual sense. If we live as in the world, under ordinances, or if we allow ourselves to be drawn into the mental world of philosophy, or into the superstitious world where men would worship angels or saints, and pry into what is unseen and unrevealed, we are violating the divinely appointed "borders". Then as to politics, it is very clear in the light of Scripture that our interests, objects, hopes and affections are to be heavenly not earthly.

Divine sovereignty appears, not only as to the portion allotted to each tribe in the land, but as regards certain persons appointed to divide the land. "And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, These are the names of the men who shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun. And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land" (verses 16,17). The general ordering of this matter was committed to Eleazar and Joshua, but there was also to be "one prince of every tribe" "to distribute to the children of Israel their inheritance in the land of Canaan" (verses 18,29). This shows that there is a divinely appointed arrangement for the distribution of the inheritance, and it will only be rightly taken up as that arrangement becomes operative. Eleazar and Joshua are typical of Christ in the exercise of priestly

and shepherd activities which have as their end the enjoyment of the inheritance by the people of God. Priestly and shepherd activities on the part of Christ ought not to be limited in our thoughts, as they sometimes are, to the wilderness side of things; they are carried on also in relation to the apportionment of the land. We do well to consider this particular service of Christ. In great part it is rendered mediately through those whom He has appointed to communicate the mind of God to His people. One has especially the apostles in mind in saying this, though all the gifts of the ascended Christ have their part in this service.

It is to be noticed that Eleazar the priest is mentioned first (as also in Joshua 14:1; Joshua 19:51; Joshua 21:1), intimating that what is spiritual, and what considers in a priestly way for God, must ever have the first place. Even Joshua, as we saw in Numbers 27:21, was to "stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall enquire for him, by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah". When what is priestly leads in the service of ministry shepherd care will not be lacking, and the tribes will be brought into possession of the inheritance. Eleazar and Joshua represent the distribution from the divine side, as under the hand of Christ, and made effective by the service of His gifts. While the princes represent, I think, the element of leadership in taking up what is given. Both sides are requisite. If the inheritance is to be possessed and enjoyed there must be the setting forth in spiritual power of what is in the mind of God to give us, and this in the Christian economy is by means of gifts who serve universally, and are not intended to be localised. But there must also be competency and spiritual energy on the part of the saints to take up their allotted part in the inheritance. And the divine thought seems to be that in each locality there shall be a definite lead in regard to this — each tribe having its "prince". The "prince" representing, not any one individual — though one spiritual brother or sister supported by the Lord can give a lead in this matter — but the element of spiritual leading as regards taking up the inheritance. This would be found in those, whether they be few or many, who are definitely set to take up what is given, and to encourage others to take it up. The overcomer in each local assembly would be the "prince" for that "tribe", moving energetically to take up the inheritance, and thus encouraging others to do likewise.

NUMBERS 35

Numbers 35

The only cities in the land mentioned in this book are the cities which were to be given to the Levites, so that Numbers presents the thought of cities to us in a levitical connection. This follows upon the inheritance being taken up by the children of Israel, because it was "of the inheritance of their possession" that they were to "give unto the Levites cities to dwell in" (verse 2). The possession of the inheritance was to result in a definite place being secured for what was levitical, and this was to be universal amongst the people of God, for all the tribes had to contribute to it in proportion to what each inherited.

The Levites had encamped round the tabernacle in the wilderness in readiness for service, but now they were to be distributed throughout the tribes so that their service as teaching Jehovah's ordinances and laws (Deuteronomy 33:10) might be known throughout Israel. "Cities" convey the idea of administration, and the number of them here (12 x 4) links this thought with what suggests universality. So that the first thought of administration in the land is a levitical one. All Israel was to be prepared to give first place to what the Levites represented; the inheritance was, first of all, to provide for that, and to give it a permanent place.

The Levites, as taken instead of the firstborn, represent the saints as "the assembly of the firstborn who are enregistered in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23), but set apart here for the service of God. They are typical of those who can serve in a spiritual way, whether Godward or manward, and who can exercise an influence that is intended to give character to all the people of God. It is not God's thought that only a few of His people should be Levites. It is the privilege of all saints to be Levites, and priests too, but God has separated these things in the types that we may apprehend them more clearly, and see the spiritual significance of each. Presenting the matter in this way helps to give definite exercise as to whether we know what it is to take up these different characters. The whole of the people of God were to be marked by the presence and influence of what ministered to His pleasure. So far as any of us can bring such an influence as that to bear we are true Levites. I have no doubt God has in mind that, as a result of the inheritance being taken up spiritually, all the assemblies of His people shall be levitical cities, where every feature proper to His service shall be found as a far-reaching influence.

Cities are prominent in this chapter, for the words "city" or "cities" occur in it nearly thirty times. This serves to remind us that God has the thought of a city very much before Him. He has prepared a city for those who seek what is

heavenly (Hebrews 11:10, 16), and when that city appears it will perfectly satisfy the desires of all who have waited for it from Abraham's day onward. For from it will emanate divine light and rule to fill the earth, where sin's confusion has been, with the knowledge and glory of God. Now I think it must be admitted that any "city" that is worthy of the name in a divine sense must partake morally of the character of God's city. All the inhabitants of a levitical city would be persons devoted to, and engaged in, the service of God. In relation to God's city it is said that "his servants shall serve him" (Revelation 22:3); what is levitical will continue there. But God's thought is to set up something here that has that character at the present time. When the Lord said, "A city situated on the top of a mountain cannot be hid", He had in mind something that would correspond morally with God's city, and that His saints would have that place. I believe God intends it to come into view that a service is being continued amongst His people which is after the pattern of the service carried on in the heavenly city. Those who serve God according to His pleasure — and such are the true tribe of Levi — are certain to carry in some way the features of His city.

So that "cities" which have levitical character are of deep interest as bringing out typically an aspect in which God's "city" thought finds expression at the present time. Where His people are together as devoted to His service there will be some power of testimony to this thought.

What is truly Levitical is intended to shed abroad the influence of God and of His will as brought out in a practical way in those who serve Him. It would seem that this was in the mind of the Spirit in appointing that levitical cities should be in every tribe of Israel. Their dwelling throughout Israel was in view of a continual radiation of light as to God, and what was due to Him in service, being preserved amongst His people. How important it is that there should be an all-pervading influence of this kind at the present time! No locality where God's testimony is found should be without it. The forty-eight levitical cities speak of such a sovereign distribution of light in practical testimony that all God's people come within the range of a spiritual influence that will impress them with the true character of His service, and that will rightly affect them in relation to it. This is what God has in mind at the present time. It must be remembered that taking up the inheritance preceded this, which shows the importance of understanding the "borders" in chapter 34. It is clearly the will of God that we should take up the inheritance within its borders, and also that we should become "fellow-citizens of the saints", viewed levitically as dwelling together in definite separation from all that is of the flesh and of the world, and committed to God for His holy service. To dwell in a levitical city at the present time is a privilege which we might all truly covet.

The "suburbs" attaching to each city intimate, I think, that the firstborn ones who serve levitically will have as much of earthly mercy as they need while they are here. They must not expect an extensive territory as regards temporal things, but they will assuredly be provided with a sufficiency. The thousand cubits, or the two thousand, do not suggest more than will be actually needed, but the full limit of this is assured to God's Levites. "Your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things" (Matthew 6:32).

"And among the cities that ye shall give unto the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither" (verse 6). It is remarkable that, immediately after the distribution of the inheritance has been spoken of, provision is made for persons who might forfeit the title to live in that inheritance. It shows that in the divine economy provision is made for abnormal conditions. It is in great mercy that it is so, for sin makes everything abnormal that it touches, and if there were no divine provision for what is abnormal, the outlook for us all would be hopeless. God foresaw that things would happen amongst His people that would be inimical to life in the land, and that would cause title to the land to be forfeited. No doubt He had specially in view the slaying of Christ, by which Israel would forfeit all title to the promises and the inheritance. But He was minded to take occasion by this to bring in blessing of a heavenly order in a risen and glorified Christ, and to set it up here in the assembly in the power of the Spirit so that it might become a refuge even for the blood-guilty. It is this which is set forth in the cities of refuge.

What is levitical at the present time has a peculiar distinction in being identified with the provision of "refuge". This is additional to anything we have read of before in connection with the service of the Levites. God's thought is to have a levitical company here amongst whom He can set forth the great resources of His mercy, so that those resources may be available for those who would otherwise perish. God glorifies Himself in mercy in presence of dreadful things, and His Levites have to be fully identified with His actings in mercy, so as to be able to serve Him in a way that is in accord with His pleasure. The provision of "refuge" is a great thought in the divine mind, and God identifies His Levites with it. It was so very manifestly in the early chapters of the Acts.

God knew that Christ would be slain, and that all men would come under blood-guiltiness in respect of His death. So in this remarkable type He made known how His grace would act even under such circumstances. It is deeply touching to think that God would, in His grace, take account of the slaying of Christ as done "without intent" (verses 11,15). But the Lord's own words upon

the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), and Peter's words later, "And now, brethren, I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers" (Acts 3:17), show that He did so account of it. On this ground the city of refuge was available, and thousands fled to it.

But "refuge" had a wondrous character in the newly formed assembly, for all that was truly levitical was there. Every acceptable service, every divine and heavenly influence, was there. Never before had men occupied such an elevated place; never before had such holy things been known and cherished in the hearts of men. But all the privilege of the assembly was available to be known as a refuge by the slayers of Christ. And in the thought of God this remains true. If men fear as they realise their sinfulness, and particularly their sinful hatred of Christ, they can flee to a "city" where Christ is loved and honoured. They are welcome to live in that "city", to share the place where God's Levites dwell, to have their part where all are committed to the service of God. Normally everyone who turns to God should have a deep sense that the only true city of refuge is to be found where God is served in the way of His own appointment. The Thessalonians had a sense of this, for they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God". God has been ready to account that much that we have done in the time past of our lives was done "without intent". But He has given us light as to the true state of things that we might flee for refuge, and reach a "city" where we are secure because we are where Christ is believed on, and loved, and honoured, and where God is served levitically. A rightly exercised person could not feel safe anywhere else. We must not be deceived by the fact that the world assumes now, to some extent, a Christian guise. It is still without, God and without Christ; it has only earthly and perishing things. We must, like the early believers, flee from the earthly to the heavenly. We can only have "strong encouragement" as we are found in the place of refugees, having "fled for refuge to lay hold oft the hope set before us, which we have as anchor of the soul, both secure and firm, and entering into that within the veil, where Jesus is entered as forerunner for us, become for ever a high priest according to the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 6:18 - 20). All those who realise the present state of the world, and the awful extent to which the will of man rules in the Christian profession, must feel it to be an imperative necessity to fly for refuge to what is of God. There is no other true city of refuge.

We have remarked that the cities of refuge were a provision for an abnormal state of things in Israel. Nothing could have been more abnormal than the rejection and slaying of the Messiah. But this gave occasion for Him to be known and believed on as in heaven, and for the refugees to find a place where God was served in a levitical and priestly way that far surpassed

anything that had been known in Israel. For something better, and heavenly, had come in with its surpassing glory.

But God had the assembly in mind, and the whole of its history, in what was "written before" (Romans 15:4). And in the cities of refuge I believe we have an intimation that God would provide a retreat for His people in the sorrowful and abnormal circumstances of the last days. He foresaw that in the history of the church much would take place that would be destructive of spiritual life. The Christian profession, instead of being a refuge, as it was at the beginning, would itself become a subject of judgment. The state of things described in 2 Timothy makes some special refuge a necessity if anything is to be preserved for the pleasure of God amidst the general departure. The more we take in of the truth concerning Christ and the assembly which has been revived during the last century the more fully will the departure be exposed to us. And as we apprehend God's thought as to the "land" which He has given to His people as a present inheritance we shall be convinced that most of what obtains in the religious world is really fatal to life in that sphere. There are not only manifest corruptions of a glaring kind, but even well-meant efforts to remedy things have resulted in the setting up of human order and sectarianism. If the truth is to be known in power and sanctification a refuge must be found from all these things. For they falsify what the assembly is as one body and as the house of God, and they put the whole levitical service out of order. All this is destructive to life in the land. God may be pleased to allow that a good deal of it has been done "without intent". Probably it large part of what militates against spiritual life today is not done with harmful "intent". But if what is of God is damaged it is a very serious matter. And when light is clearly thrown upon these things by the ministry of the word the plea of ignorance can no longer be urged.

But God has made provision in His mercy for cities of refuge to be available for those who come under conviction in regard to all these things. He has called upon His people to "withdraw from iniquity"; He has bid them purify themselves from vessels to dishonour in separating from them; He has enjoined them to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart", (see 2 Timothy 2:19 - 22). In moving thus we shall assuredly find ourselves in a place of refuge. And it is obvious that in so moving we shall find ourselves in levitical surroundings. The two epistles to Timothy are, in a special way, levitical epistles, and the second epistle has in view the last days, and the kind of associations which are suitable if spiritual life is to be preserved and enjoyed, notwithstanding the abnormal conditions which have come in. What is truly levitical and priestly can only be found in a day of departure as we definitely act on the principle of separation from what is shown to be contrary to the truth. The levitical service, as we have known it

in the early part of Numbers, was marked by particular care, under priestly direction, that every detail of what Jehovah had commanded in relation to His tabernacle should be faithfully carried out. The cities of refuge being levitical cities suggests that any true refuge, in a day when the normal order of divine service has been violated, must be found amongst those who are prepared to stand by what is of God at a time when it is in reproach. All in Asia had turned away from Paul, but he exhorted Timothy to "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. And the things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also" (2 Timothy 2:1,2). In a levitical "city" one would expect to find a wealth of spiritual instruction, and the companionship of those who value that instruction. And to such a "city" God would lead all His exercised people today. We are not called upon to dwell alone, but to prove the truth of that word: "And he led them forth by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Psalm 107:7).

The cities of refuge in the land were in "the hill country" (Joshua 20:7). It is in going up into the elevation of what is spiritual and heavenly that a refuge is found from all those things which have brought so much guilt upon the Christian profession. The thoughts of God have never come down from the high level of the apostolic teaching, and He has most graciously revived that teaching in these last days, that His people may come to it as a way of escape from the many evils that are occurrent. I suppose that the teaching of Paul and John never came so widely before the saints as it has within the last hundred years, and this has been by actings of pure mercy, that exercised hearts might be drawn to what is most precious and elevated, and might enjoy together the thoughts of divine love that have been so long departed from. Whatever has been vouchsafed in the way of spiritual light and blessing is available as a refuge. But it must be understood that the refugees are under certain limitations. They must not play fast and loose with the conditions on which the refuge is provided. To go outside the walls of the "city" is to expose themselves to danger. There must be no relaxation of the principle of separation; no faltering in the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, peace; no weakening of pure heart dependence; no want of loyalty to the bond in which we walk with our like-minded brethren. We shall not be freed from these limitations — nor would any true heart wish to be freed from them — until the present priestly service of Christ for us ceases, and He calls us up to be for ever with Him in conditions of glory (verses 25,28).

The "murderer", so often referred to in the latter half of this chapter, who dies without mercy, no doubt typifies the Jews who manifested deliberate and persistent enmity against Christ. Stephen before the council did not address

them as being manslayers "without intent". They had now added to their great sin the refusal of the Spirit's testimony to Christ as exalted, and he indicted them now as "deliverers up and murderers" of the just One. Personally Stephen was in the grace of the dispensation, for as to his own martyrdom he prayed, "Lord, lay not *this* sin to their charge". But he regarded them as having come under the full guilt of what they had done to Christ. They not only despised the city of refuge for themselves, but afterwards they did all they could to hinder the glad tidings going out to Gentiles, and in consequence of this the wrath came upon them to the uttermost. In like manner those in the Christian profession in these last days who refuse to hear the Spirit's voice will drift more and more into deliberate antagonism to what is of God, and will also perish.

NUMBERS 36

Numbers 36

The closing chapters of this book have the inheritance distinctly in view, and the fact that abnormal conditions are contemplated gives the instruction a special bearing on the present time. The lack of male issue in the family of Zelophehad, and his daughters being five in number, suggest conditions of weakness. It is helpful to see that the inheritance can be taken up even in such conditions, but that it has to be taken up in the divinely appointed way.

God had given the birthright in Israel to Joseph (1 Chronicles 5:2), so that it was appropriate that questions about the inheritance should be raised in connection with five of his daughters. It had been decided by Jehovah, as we have seen in chapter 27, that if an Israelite had no son his daughter should inherit. The family relationship secured this right, and it was not to be invalidated. It is a comfort to know that those born of God are His children, and they are entitled to inherit, notwithstanding all that has come to pass in the way of abnormal conditions. Admitting all the weakness on our side, we can still say, "See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1). "Those who love God" (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 2:9) are not only heirs in title, but they have a nature suited to inherit what divine love has prepared for them. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, heirs also: heirs of God, and Christ's joint heirs" (Romans 8:16,17). The Apostle reasons, "And if children, heirs also" — as much as to say, If you are children, the inheritance must have a great place in your thoughts. I suppose the children of God come to light in three ways: (1) by practising righteousness; (2) by loving the brethren; and (3) by having interest in the inheritance. Zelophehad's daughters had proved themselves to be true children of Joseph by their interest in the inheritance.

It is to be noted, in this connection, that John, whose writings have specially in view the last days, speaks much of eternal life, which for us is the inheritance, and he also dwells much on the thought of children and of being born of God. The inheritance is the portion of children — of those who are in nature capable of appreciating it.

But the chapter now before us shows that the inheritance was to be taken up tribally, and that it was not to pass from tribe to tribe. The tribes were each allotted their portion in sovereignty, so that the whole land was possessed by each tribe holding its own full portion. Every Israelite inherited as being one of a tribe; he was preserved by the divine ordering from individualizing himself,

and he was also preserved from being too general in his thoughts and overlooking his immediate relations with his own tribe. We inherit *with the brethren* as having a common portion with them in Christ, and a sense of this would preserve us from being narrowed up to ourselves. If we have blessing in Christ we have it in company with all God's elect; in regard of the inheritance we cannot detach ourselves from the whole Israel of God. But we may admit this in a general way without having much of the gain of it in a practical sense. For the enjoyment of the inheritance in a practical way we must walk in companionship with our brethren locally, and we must take up with them the exercise and responsibility of not letting go any part of what is assigned to us tribally. There was great concern in the chief fathers of Manasseh (verses 1 - 4) that no part of the inheritance of the tribe of their fathers should be taken away. Such an exercise would rightly be found in *every* tribe, for it was by each tribe holding its portion undiminished that the whole inheritance was possessed. If one tribe failed to retain its full portion there would be a breach of the divine allotment, and all Israel would be adversely affected.

The divine arrangement for the enjoyment of the inheritance is that God's people shall take it up together in the various localities in which they are found. If we have light as to the common portion of the saints universally it becomes our privilege and responsibility to recognise this by walking together locally in accord with it. In the original ordering of things assemblies were found in every locality where the grace of God wrought. There was one body and one Spirit universally, but the practical working out of the truth in spiritual intelligence and affection was in local companies who "in every place" called on the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2). God intended His people to be together in their various localities, as walking practically in the fellowship to which He had called them, so that they might enjoy together the inheritance which His love has bestowed upon them.

The body is one universally, but the functioning of the members, and the action of the various gifts by the Spirit, is in the local companies where they are found. Each local company of saints has "body" character, and the saints in it are "members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Anything that hinders the functioning of the members takes away something from the inheritance as it may be enjoyed locally. The scripture, "And if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" is often applied to physical or circumstantial suffering with which the saints sympathize. But I have no doubt that in the connection in which it stands (1 Corinthians 12) it can be applied to a member who, for some reason, is unable to function happily and normally. This is not only a loss to the particular member, but it makes all suffer. It is a sad and regrettable

thing if a member of Christ's body suffers so that it does not function normally as in co-ordination with the other local members. All suffer by being deprived of what the suffering member ought to contribute. Who can tell what is lost to the saints today by spiritual vitality being so low that there is not power in many members to function normally? How much of the inheritance is taken away, in a practical sense, from the local "tribes" by this kind of suffering! This is surely a serious matter for consideration. Even if I were content to suffer myself from some spiritual weakness or disease, it ought to be a great concern to me to be in a state that deprives all my local brethren of something which I alone can contribute. Every member should feel that his spiritual health and vigour must be fully maintained so that the way in which he functions may be a cause of rejoicing to all the other members.

It needs all the members to take up the portion in Christ, and it only becomes available for the joy of all as they function spiritually. The distinctions of gifts, and of services, and of operations are designed of God to make known and to retain in the affections of the saints what He has given to them in love as a present inheritance, But these spiritual activities cannot possibly minister to what is sectarian because they come out in many members who form one body, and each local company of saints to be according to the truth, and to provide for the members functioning as God intended, must have "body" character. If the Spirit is quenched by the setting up of a human order of service the normal functioning of the members is checked, and in result the inheritance is, in a practical sense, taken away from the local "tribe".

The will of man did not enter into the original allotment of what was possessed by each local "tribe", and why should any movements be allowed which have the effect of changing that allotment? Even in the day of abnormal conditions God's people are under responsibility to see that nothing subversive of His order shall be tolerated. It becomes the exercise of each "tribe" to see that not a bit of what has been assigned sovereignly shall be taken from us. Any company of saints walking together should have this exercise. For we can only inherit according to God as we maintain it. By each "tribe" holding its full portion the whole inheritance would be held in a divine way, and the universal unity maintained unbroken. Any action of our own will, or any acquiescence in what others have wrongly introduced, will have the effect of taking away some of the inheritance which rightly pertains to our local "tribe". But all that is appointed of God will tend to retain it. So that we all have to learn the lesson of Zelophehad's daughters, and be in subjection to divine appointments, that our "tribe" may not suffer loss. This is an exercise for every one in the Israel of God.

People say that things are not now as they were in the Apostles' days! Alas! this is only too true. But it does not speak of progress, but of decline and departure. Things are very abnormal now. The people of God generally know little of what it is to stand together in the localities where they are found, apart from human order and arrangements, and giving place to every sovereign divine allotment of spiritual gift that God has set amongst them. But this is undoubtedly God's thought for them. Each "tribe" is to hold its full God-given portion. Human learning or eloquence can never compensate for the setting aside of the spiritual endowments of the assembly. In so far as the normal functioning of the body and all its members is interfered with (whether it be by the members themselves being in a paralysed or inefficient state, or by their being reduced to inactivity by some order of service which is not according to God's mind) in so far will the enjoyment of the inheritance be lost to the local "tribe".

The people of God, as walking together in any locality, cannot afford to surrender the smallest bit of the inheritance. Abnormal conditions are never to be allowed to become a reason, or an excuse, for letting go any part of what is God-given in Christ. We are not called upon to set up anything, or to make any human arrangements whatever. It is our part to recognise what God has given in sovereign love, and the spiritual endowments which He has conferred upon the assembly that it might stand in the good of the inheritance. Notwithstanding all the departure it has been found possible for even "two or three" to take up this exercise and privilege. When a few saints, about a hundred years ago, separated from national and sectarian bodies, as realising their privilege to come together locally simply as members of Christ's body, light began to be given as to the assembly and the inheritance in Christ such as had not been known since the days of the apostles. In some practical, even if very limited, way the inheritance began to be enjoyed according to the original mind and ordering of God. It was recovery in remnant character, and in testimony, to what was in God's mind. Zelophehad's daughters represent, I believe, a remnant who take up the inheritance as being faithful to the original order notwithstanding conscious weakness. They maintained, typically, the local ordering and endowment of the assembly.

The abnormal time is, indeed, with us, the time of manifest weakness. But the exercise of the chief fathers of Manasseh, and the divine enactment relative thereto, teach us that no part of what is God-given is to be allowed to pass from any one of the "tribes". Such is the lesson with which the book of Numbers closes.