

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Numbers 10

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them; that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camp. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee. When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward. When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys. But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priest, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations. And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God. I am the Lord your God" (Verses 1-10).

We have quoted the entire of this interesting passage for the reader, in order that he may have before him, in the veritable language of inspiration, the lovely institution of "**The silver trumpets.**"

It comes in, with striking fitness, immediately after the instruction respecting the movement of the cloud, and is bound up, in a very marked way, with the entire history of Israel, not only in the past but also in the future. The sound of the trumpet was familiar to every circumcised ear. It was the communication of the mind of GOD, in a form distinct and simple enough to be understood by every member of the congregation, however distant he might be from the source whence the testimony emanated. GOD took care that each one in that vast assembly, however far away, should hear the silvery tones of the trumpet of testimony.

Each trumpet was to be made of one piece, and they fulfilled a double purpose.

In other words, the source of the testimony was one, however the object and practical result might vary. Every movement in the camp was to be the result of the sound of the trumpet.

- was the congregation to be gathered in festive joy and worship? It was by a certain sound of the trumpet.
- were the tribes to be gathered in hostile array? It was by a blast of the trumpet.

In a word, the solemn assembly, and the warlike host; the instruments of music and the weapons of war - all - all was regulated by the silver trumpet. Any movement, whether festive, religious, or hostile, that was not the result of that familiar sound, could be but the fruit of a restless and unsubdued will, which the Lord could, by no means, sanction. The pilgrim host in the wilderness was as dependent upon the sound of the trumpet as upon the movement of the cloud. The testimony of GOD, communicated in that particular manner, was to govern every movement throughout the many thousands of Israel.

Moreover, it pertained to the sons of Aaron, the priests, to blow with the trumpets, for the mind of GOD can only be known and communicated in priestly nearness and communion. It was the high and holy privilege of the priestly family to cluster round the sanctuary of GOD, there to catch the first movement of the cloud, and communicate the same to the most distant parts of the camp. They were responsible to give a certain sound, and every member of the militant host was equally responsible to yield a ready and an implicit obedience. It would have been at once positive rebellion for any to attempt to move without the word of command, or to refuse to move when once that word was given. All had to wait upon the divine testimony, and walk in the light thereof the very moment it was given. To move without the testimony would be to move in the dark; to refuse to move, when the testimony was given, would be to remain in the dark.

This is most simple and deeply practical.

We can have no difficulty in seeing its force and application, in the case of the congregation in the wilderness. But let us remember that all this was a type; and, further, that it is written for our learning. We are solemnly bound, therefore, to look into it; we are imperatively called upon to seek to gather up and treasure up the great practical instruction contained in the singularly beautiful ordinance of the silver trumpet. Nothing could be more seasonable for the present moment.

It teaches a lesson to which the Christian reader should give his most profound attention. It sets forth, in the most distinct manner possible, that GOD's people are to be absolutely dependent

upon, and wholly subject to, divine testimony, in all their movements. A child may read this in the type before us. The congregation in the wilderness dared not assemble for any festive or religious object until they heard the sound of the trumpet; nor could the men of war buckle on their armour, till summoned forth by the signal of alarm to meet the uncircumcised foe. They worshipped and they fought, they journeyed and they halted, in simple obedience to the trumpet call. It was not, by any means, a question of their likings or dislikings, their thoughts, their opinions, or their judgment. It was simply and entirely a question of implicit obedience. Their every movement was dependent upon the testimony of GOD, as given by the priests from the sanctuary. The song of the worshipper and the shout of the warrior were each the simple fruit of the testimony of GOD.

How beautiful! How striking! How instructive! And, let us add, how deeply practical!

Why do we dwell upon it? Because we firmly believe it contains a needed lesson for the day in which our lot is cast. If there is one feature more characteristic than another of the present hour, it is in subjection to divine authority - positive resistance of the truth when it demands unqualified obedience and self-surrender. It is all well enough so long as it is truth setting forth, with divine fullness and clearness, our pardon, our acceptance, our life, our righteousness, our eternal security in CHRIST. This will be listened to, and delighted in. But the very moment it becomes a question of the claims and authority of that blessed one who gave His life to save us from the flames of hell, and introduce us to the everlasting joys of Heaven, all manner of difficulties are started; all sorts of reasonings and questions are raised; clouds of prejudice gather round the soul, and darken the understanding, the sharp edge of truth is blunted or turned aside, in a thousand ways. There is no waiting for the sound of the trumpet; and when it sounds, with a blast as clear as GOD himself can give, there is no response to the summons. We move when we ought to be still; and we halt when we ought to be moving.

Reader, what must be the result of this? Either no progress at all, or progress in a wrong direction, which is worse than none. it is utterly impossible that we can advance in the divine life, unless we yield ourselves, without reserve, to the Word of the Lord.

Saved we may be, through the rich aboundings of divine mercy, and through the atoning virtues of a Saviour's Blood; but shall we rest satisfied with being saved by CHRIST, and not seek, in some feeble measure, to walk with him, and live for Him? Shall we accept of salvation through the work which He has wrought, not long after deeper intimacy of communion with Himself, and more complete subjection to His authority in all things? How would it have been with Israel in the wilderness, had they refused attention to the sound of the trumpet? We can see it at a glance. If, for example, they had presumed, at any time, to assemble for a festive or religious object, without the divinely appointed summons; what would have been the result? Or, further, had they taken it upon themselves to move forward on their journey, or go forth to war, ere the trumpet had sounded an alarm; How would it have been? Or, finally, had they refused to move, when called by the sound of the trumpet, either to the solemn assembly, the onward march, or to the battle, how would they have fared?

The answer is as plain as a sunbeam. Let us ponder it. It has a lesson for us. Let us apply our hearts to it.

The silver trumpet settled and ordered every movement for Israel of old. The testimony of GOD

ought to settle and order everything for the Church now. That silver trumpet was blown by the priests of old. That testimony of GOD is known in priestly communion now. A Christian has no right to move or act apart from divine testimony. He must wait upon the word of his Lord. Till he gets that, he must stand still. When he has gotten it, he must go forward. GOD can and does communicate His mind to His militant people now, just as distinctly as He did to His people of old. True, it is not now by the sound of a trumpet, or the movement of a cloud; but by His Word and Spirit. It is not by anything that strikes the senses that our Father guides us; But by that which acts on the heart, the conscience, and the understanding. It is not by that which is natural, but by that which is spiritual, that He communicates His mind.

But let us be well assured of this, that our GOD can and does give our hearts full certainty both as to what we should do, and what we should not do; as to where we should go, and where we should not go. It seems strange to be obliged to insist upon this - passing strange that any Christian should doubt, much less deny it. And yet so it is. We are often in doubt and perplexity; and some there are who are ready to deny that there can be any such thing as certainty as to the details of daily life and action. This surely is wrong. Cannot an earthly father communicate his mind to his child as to the most minute particulars of his conduct? Who will deny this? And cannot our Father communicate His mind to us, as to all our ways, from day to day? Unquestionably He can; and let not the Christian reader be robbed of the holy privilege of knowing his Father's mind in reference to every circumstance of his daily life.

Are we to suppose, for a moment, that the Church of GOD is worse off, in the matter of guidance, than the camp in the desert? Impossible.

How is it, then, that one often finds Christians at a loss as to their movements? It must be owing to the lack of a circumcised ear to hear the sound of the silver trumpet, and of a subject will to yield a response to the sound. It may, however, be said that we are not to expect to hear a voice from Heaven telling us to do this or that, or to go hither or thither; nor yet to find a literal text of Scripture to guide us in the minor matters of our every day history.

How, for example, is one to know whether he ought to visit a certain town, and remain there a certain time? We reply, If the ear is circumcised, you will assuredly hear the silver trumpet. Till that sounds, never stir: when it sounds, never tarry. This will make all so clear, so simple, so safe, so certain. It is the grand cure for doubt, hesitancy, and vacillation. It will save us from the necessity of running for advice to this one and that one, as to how we should act, or where we should go, and, furthermore, it will teach us that it is none of our business to attempt to control the actions or movements of others.

Let each one have his ear open, and his heart subject, and then, assuredly, he will possess all the certainty that GOD can give him, as to his every act and movement, from day to day. Our ever gracious GOD can give clearness and decision as to everything. If he does not give it, no one can. If He does, no one need.

Thus much as to the beautiful institution of the silver trumpet, which we shall not pursue further now, though, as we have noticed above, it is not confined, in its application to Israel in the wilderness, but is bound up with their entire history right onward to the end. Thus we have the feast of trumpets; the trumpet of the jubilee; the blowing of trumpets over their sacrifices, upon which we do not now dwell, as our immediate object is to help the reader to seize the grand idea

presented in the opening paragraph of our chapter.

May the Holy Spirit impress upon our hearts the needed lesson of "**the silver trumpets!**"

We have now travelled, in our meditations on this precious book, the moment in the which the camp is called to move forward. All is duly ordered, according to that grand regulator - "**The commandment of the Lord.**" Each man according to his pedigree, and each tribe according to the standard thereof, is in the divinely appointed place.

- the Levites are at their posts, each with his own clearly defined work to do.
- full provision is made for the cleansing of the camp from every species of defilement; and not only so, but the lofty standard of personal holiness is unfurled, and the fruits of active benevolence are presented.
- then we have the golden candlestick and its seven lamps, giving forth their pure and precious light.
- we have the pillar of fire and of cloud; and, finally,
- the double testimony of the silver trumpet.

In short, nothing is lacking to the pilgrim host. A vigilant eye, a powerful hand, and a loving heart have provided for every possible contingency, so that the whole congregation in the wilderness, and each member in particular, might be "**thoroughly furnished.**"

This is only what we might expect. If GOD undertakes to provide for any one, or for any people, the provision, must of necessity, be perfect. It is wholly impossible that GOD could omit any one thing needful. He knows all things, and can do all things. Nothing can escape His vigilant eye; nothing is beyond His omnipotent hand. Hence, therefore, all those who can truly say, "**The Lord is my Shepherd,**" may add, without hesitancy or reserve, "**I shall not want.**"

The soul that is, in truth and reality, leaning on the arm of the living GOD can never - shall never - want any good thing. The poor foolish heart may imagine a thousand wants; but GOD knows what we really want, and He will provide for ALL.

Thus, then, the camp is ready to move; but, strange to say, there is a departure from the order laid down in the opening of the book.

The ark of the covenant, instead of reposing in the bosom of the camp, goes in the very front. In other words, the Lord, instead of remaining in the center of the congregation to be waited upon there, actually condescends, in His marvellous, inimitable grace, to do the work of an avant-courier, for His people.

But let us see what it is that leads to this touching display of grace.

"And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred. And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the

wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes."

Now, if we did not know something of our own hearts, and the tendency thereof to lean on the creature! rather than upon the living GOD, we might well marvel at the above. We might feel disposed to enquire, What could Moses possibly want with Hobab's eyes? Was not the Lord sufficient? Did not He know the wilderness? Would He suffer them to go astray? What of the cloud and the silver trumpet? were not they better than Hobab's eyes? why, then, did Moses seek for human aid? Alas! alas! We can but too well understand the reason. We all know, to our sorrow and loss, the tendency of the heart to lean upon something that our eyes can see. We do not like to occupy the ground of absolute dependence upon GOD for every step of the journey. we find it hard to lean upon an unseen arm. A Hobab that we can see inspires as with more confidence than the living GOD whom we cannot see. We move on with comfort and satisfaction when we possess the countenance and help of some poor failing mortal; but we hesitate, falter, and quail when called to move on in naked faith in GOD.

These statements may seem strong; but the question is, are they true? Is there a Christian who reads these lines that will not freely own that it is even so? We are all prone to lean upon an arm of in flesh, and that, too, in the face of a thousand and one examples of the folly of so doing. We have proved, times without number, the vanity of All creature confidences, and yet we will confide in the creature. On the other hand, we have, again and again, proved the reality of leaning upon the word and upon the arm of the living GOD. We have found that He has never failed us, never disappointed us, nay, that He has always done exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; and yet we are ever ready to distrust Him, ever ready to lean upon any broken reed, and betake ourselves to any broken cistern.

Thus it is with us; But, blessed be GOD, His grace abounds toward us, as it did toward Israel, on the occasion to which we are now referring. If Moses will look to Hobab for guidance, the Lord will teach His Servant that He Himself is all-sufficient as a guide.

"And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them."

What rich, what precious grace! In place of their finding a resting-place for Him, He would find a resting place for them. What a thought! The mighty GOD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, going through the wilderness to look out for a suitable camping ground for a people who were ready, at every turn in their path, to murmur and rebel against Him!

Such is our GOD, ever "patient, gracious, powerful, holy" - ever rising, in the magnificence of His grace above all our unbelief and failure, and proving Himself superior, in His love, to all the barriers which our unfaithfulness would erect. He, most assuredly, proved to Moses and to Israel, that He was far better as a guide than ten thousand Hobabs. We are not told in this place, whether Hobab went or not. He certainly refused the first appeal, and perhaps the second likewise. But we are told that the Lord went with them.

"The cloud of the Lord was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp."

Blessed shelter in the wilderness! Blessed, unfailing resource, in everything! He went before His people to search them out a resting place, and when He had found a spot suited to their need, He halted with them, and spread His sheltering wing over them, to protect them from every foe.

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him" (Deuteronomy 32:10-12). **"He spread a Cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night"** (Psalm 105:39).

Thus, then, all was provided for, according to the wisdom, power, and goodness of GOD. Nothing was, or could be, lacking, inasmuch as GOD Himself was there.

"And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel."

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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