

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 30 - Numbers 31

This brief section has what we may term a dispensational bearing. It applies specially to Israel, and treats of the question of vows and bonds. The man and the woman stand in marked contrast, in relation to this subject.

"If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Verse 2).

In reference to the woman, the case was different.

"If a woman also vow a vow unto the Lord, and bind herself by a bond, being in her fathers house in her youth; and her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every word wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of Her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the Lord shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her" (Ver. 3-5).

The same thing applied in the case of a wife. Her husband could either confirm or disannul all her vows and bonds.

Such was the law with regard to vows. There was no relief for the man. He was bound to go right

through with whatever had proceeded out of his mouth. Whatever he undertook to do, he was solemnly and irreversibly held to it. There was no back door, as we say - no way of getting out of it.

Now we know who, in perfect grace, took this position, and voluntarily bound himself to accomplish the will of GOD, whatever that will might be. We know who it is that says, **"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."** **"The man Christ Jesus,"** who, having taken the vows upon Him, discharged them perfectly to the glory of GOD, and the eternal blessing of His people. There was no escape for Him. We hear Him exclaiming, in the deep anguish of His soul, in the garden of Gethsemane, **"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."** But it was not possible. He had undertaken the work of man's salvation, and He had to go through the deep and dark waters of death, judgment, and wrath; and perfectly meet all the consequences of man's condition. He had a baptism to be baptized with, and was straitened until it was accomplished.

In other words, He had to die in order that, by death, He might open the pent-up flood gates, and allow the mighty tide of divine and everlasting love to flow down to His people. All praise and adoration be to His peerless name for ever!

Thus much as to the man and his vows and bonds. In the case of the woman, whether as the daughter or the wife, we have the nation of Israel, and that in two ways, namely, under government and under grace.

Looked at from a governmental point of view, the Lord, who is at once the Father and the Husband, has held his peace at her, so that her vows and bonds are allowed to stand; and she is, to this day, suffering the consequences, and made to feel the force of those words, **"Better that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."**

But, on the other hand, as viewed from the blessed standpoint of grace, the Father and the Husband has taken all upon Himself, so that she shall be forgiven and brought into the fullness of blessing by and by, not on the ground of accomplished vows and ratified bonds, but on the ground of sovereign grace and mercy, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. How precious to find CHRIST everywhere! He is the center and foundation, the beginning and the end, of all the ways of GOD.

May our hearts be ever filled with him! May our lips and lives speak His praise! May we, constrained by His love, live to His glory all our days upon earth, and then go home to be with Himself for ever, to go no more out!

We have here given what we believe to be the primary thought of this chapter. That it may be applied, in a secondary way, to individuals, we do not, by any means, question; and further, that, like all Scripture, it has been written for our learning, we most thankfully own. It must ever be the delight of the devout Christian to study all the wars of GOD, whether in grace or government - His ways with Israel - His ways with the Church - His ways with all - His ways with each. Oh! to pursue this study with an enlarged heart and an enlightened understanding!

Numbers 31

We have here the closing scene of Moses' official life; as in Deuteronomy 34 we have the closing scene of his personal history.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites; afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian. Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand. And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males" (Verses 3-7).

This is a very remarkable passage. The Lord says to Moses, **"Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites."**

And Moses says to Israel, **"Avenge the Lord of Midian."**

The people had been ensnared by the wiles of the daughters of Midian, through the evil influence of Balaam the son of Peor; and they are now called upon to clear themselves thoroughly from all the defilement which, through want of watchfulness, they had contracted. The sword is to be brought upon the Midianites; and all the spoil is to be made to pass either through the fire of judgment or through the water of purification. Not one jot or tittle of the evil thing is to be suffered to pass unjudged.

Now, this war was what we may call abnormal. By right, the people ought not to have had any occasion to encounter it at all. It was not one of the wars of Canaan. It was simply the result of their own unfaithfulness - the fruit of their own unhallowed commerce with the uncircumcised. Hence, although Joshua, the son of Nun, had been duly appointed to succeed Moses, as leader of the congregation, we find no mention whatever of him in connection with this war. On the contrary, it is to Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, that the conduct of this expedition is committed; and he enters upon it **"with the holy instruments and the trumpets."**

All this is strongly marked. The priest is the prominent person; and the holy instruments, the prominent instrumentality. It is a question of wiping away the stain caused by their unholy association with the enemy; and therefore, instead of a general officer with sword and spear, it is a priest with holy instruments that appears in the foreground. True, the sword is here; but it is not the prominent thing. It is the priest with the vessels of the sanctuary; and that priest the selfsame man who first executed judgment upon that very evil which has here to be avenged.

The moral of all this is, at once, plain and practical.

The Midianites furnish a type of that peculiar kind of influence which the world exerts over the hearts of the people of GOD - the fascinating and ensnaring power of the world used by Satan to hinder our entrance upon our proper heavenly portion. Israel should have had nothing to do with these Midianites; but having, in an evil hour - an unguarded moment - been betrayed into

association with them, nothing remains but war and utter extermination.

So with us, as Christians.

Our proper business is to pass through the world, as pilgrims and strangers; having nothing to do with it, save to be the patient witnesses of the grace of CHRIST, and thus shine as lights in the midst of the surrounding moral gloom. But, alas! we fail to maintain this rigid separation; we suffer ourselves to be betrayed into alliance with the world, and, in consequence, we get involved in trouble and conflict which does not properly belong to us at all.

War with Midian formed no part of Israel's proper work. They had to thank themselves for it. But GOD is gracious; and hence, through a special application of priestly ministry, they were enabled, not only to conquer the Midianites, but to carry away much spoil.

GOD, in His infinite goodness, brings good out of evil. He will cause the eater to yield meat, and the strong sweetness. His grace shines out, with exceeding brightness, in the scene before us, inasmuch as He actually deigns to accept a portion of the spoils taken from the Midianites. But the evil had to be thoroughly judged.

"**Every male**" had to be put to death - all in whom there was the energy of the evil had to be completely exterminated; and finally the fire of judgment and the water of purification had to do their work on the spoil, ere GOD or His people could touch an atom of it.

What holy lessons are here! May we apply our hearts to them! May we be enabled to pursue a path of more intense separation, and to press on our heavenly road as those whose portion and whose home is on high! GOD, in His mercy grant it?

~ end of chapter 30, 31 ~

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