

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

"Things new and old."

Copyright © 1862

by

F. H. Revell

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

Numbers 33 - Numbers 36

The first of these sections gives us a wonderfully minute description of the desert wanderings of the people of GOD.

It is impossible to read it without being deeply moved by the tender love and care of GOD so signally displayed throughout the whole. To think of His deigning to keep such a record of the journeyings of His poor people, from the moment they marched out of Egypt until they crossed the Jordan - from the land of death and darkness to the land flowing with milk and honey.

"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing."

He went before them, every step of the way; He travelled over every stage of the wilderness; in all their afflictions He was afflicted. He took care of them like a tender nurse. He suffered not their garments to wax old, or their feet to swell, for these forty years; and here He retraces the entire way by which His hand had led them, carefully noting down each successive stage of that marvellous pilgrimage, and every spot in the desert at which they had halted. What a journey! What a travelling companion!

It is very consolatory to the heart of the poor, weary pilgrim to be assured that every stage of his wilderness journey is marked out by the infinite love and unerring wisdom of GOD. He is leading His people by a right way, home to Himself; and there is not a single circumstance in

their lot, or a single ingredient in their cup, which is not carefully ordered by Himself, with direct reference to their present profit and their everlasting felicity. Let it only be our care to walk with Him, day by day, in simple confidence, casting all our care upon Him, and leaving ourselves and all our belongings absolutely in His hands. This is the true source of peace and blessedness, all the journey through. And then, when our desert wanderings are over - when the last stage of the wilderness has been trodden, He will take us home to be with Himself for ever.

"There with what joy reviewing
Past conflicts, dangers, fears
Thy hand our foes subduing,
And drying all our tears.

Our hearts with rapture burning,
The path we shall retrace,
where now our souls are learning,
The riches of Thy grace."

Numbers 34 gives the boundaries of the inheritance, as drawn by the hand of the Lord. The self-same hand which had guided their wanderings here fixes the bounds of their habitation. Alas! they never took possession of the land as given of GOD. He gave them the whole land, and gave it for ever. They took but a part, and that for a time. But, blessed be GOD, the moment is approaching when the seed of Abraham shall enter upon the full and everlasting possession of that fair inheritance, from which they are for the present excluded.

The Lord will assuredly accomplish all His promises, and lead His people into all the blessings secured to them in the everlasting covenant - that covenant which has been ratified by the Blood of the Lamb. Not one jot or tittle shall fail of all that He has spoken. His promises are all Yea and Amen in CHRIST JESUS, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. All praise to the father, and unto the Son, and to the Holy Spirit!

Numbers 35

The opening lines of this most interesting chapter set before us the gracious provision which the Lord made for His servants the Levites.

Each of the tribes of Israel was privileged - that we say not bound - to furnish the Levites with a certain number of cities with their suburbs, according to their ability.

"All the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs. And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites, according to his inheritance which he inheriteth" (Verses 7, 8).

The Lord's servants were wholly cast upon Him for their portion. They had no inheritance or possession saving himself. Blessed inheritance! Precious portion! None like it, in the judgment of faith. Blessed are all those who can truly say to the Lord, **"Thou art the portion of my cup,**

and the lot of my inheritance." GOD took care of His dependent servants, and permitted the whole congregation of Israel to taste the hallowed privilege - for such it most assuredly was - of being co-workers with Him in providing for those who had willingly devoted themselves to His work, abandoning all besides.

Thus, then, we learn that, out of the twelve tribes of Israel, forty and eight cities, with their suburbs, were to be given over to the Levites; and out of these again, the Levites had the privilege of furnishing six cities to be a refuge for the poor manslayer. Most lovely provision! Lovely in its origin! Lovely in its object!

The cities of refuge were situated, three on the eastern and three on the western side of Jordan. whether Reuben and Gad were right or wrong in settling east of that significant boundary, GOD in His mercy would not leave the slayer without a refuge from the avenger of blood. On the contrary, like Himself, He ordained that those cities which were designed as a merciful provision for the slayer should be so situated that wherever there was need of a shelter that shelter might be near at hand. There was always a city within reach of any who might be exposed to the sword of the avenger. This was worthy of our GOD. If any slayer happened to fall into the hands of the avenger of blood, it was not for want of a refuge near at hand, but because he had failed to avail himself of it. All necessary provision was made; the cities were named, and well defined, and publicly known. Everything was made as plain, as simple, and as easy as possible. Such was GOD's gracious way.

No doubt, the slayer was responsible to put forth all his energy to reach the sacred precincts; and, no doubt, he would. It is not at all likely that any one would be so blind or so infatuated as to fold his arms, in cool indifference, and say, "If I am fated to escape, I shall escape, my efforts are not needed. If I am not fated to escape, I cannot escape, my efforts are of no use." We cannot fancy a manslayer using such silly language, or being guilty of such blind fatality as this. He knew too well that if the avenger could but lay his hand upon him, all such notions would be of small account.

There was but the one thing to be done, and that was to escape for his life - to flee from impending judgment to find his safe abode within the gates of the city of refuge. Once there, he could breathe freely. No evil could overtake him there. The moment He crossed the threshold of the gate, he was as safe as GOD's provision could make him. if a hair of his head could be touched, within the bounds of the city, it could but be a dishonour and a reproach upon the ordinance of GOD. True, he had to keep close. He dared not venture outside the gate. Within, he was perfectly safe. Without, he was thoroughly exposed. He could not even visit his friends. He was an exile from his Father's house. He was a prisoner of hope. Absent from the home of his heart's affections, he waited for the death of the high priest, which was to set him perfectly free and restore him, once more, to his inheritance and to his people.

Now, we believe that this beautiful ordinance had special reference to Israel.

They have killed the Prince of life; but the question is, as which are they viewed by GOD, as the murderer or as the slayer? If the former, there is no refuge, no hope. No murderer could be sheltered within the city of refuge.

Here is the law of the case, as stated in Joshua 20.

"The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: that the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime, And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled" (Verses 1-6).

But with respect to the murderer; the law was rigid and unbending.

"The murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him" (Numbers 35).

Israel, then, through the marvellous grace of GOD, will be treated as a slayer and not as a murderer. **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."**

These potent words ascended to the ear and to the heart of the GOD of Israel. They were heard and answered; nor are we to suppose that the answer was exhausted in its application on the day of Pentecost. No; it still holds good, and its efficacy will be illustrated in the future history of the house of Israel.

That people are now under GOD's keeping.

They are exiles from the land and the home of their fathers. But the time is coming when they shall be restored to their own land, not by the death of the high priest - blessed be His deathless name! He can never die - but He will leave His present position, and come forth, in a new character, as the Royal Priest, to sit upon His throne. Then shall the exile return to his long-lost home, and his forfeited inheritance. But not till then, else it would be ignoring the fact that they killed the Prince of life, which were impossible. The manslayer must remain out of his possession until the appointed time; but he is not to be treated as a murderer, because he did it unwittingly.

"I obtained mercy" - says the Apostle Paul, speaking as a pattern to Israel "because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "And now, brethren," says Peter, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

These passages, together with the precious intercession of the slain One, do, in the most distinct manner, place Israel on the ground of the manslayer, and not on the ground of the murderer. GOD has provided a refuge and a shelter for His much-loved people, and in due time they shall return to their long-lost dwellings, in that land which the Lord gave as a gift to Abraham his

friend for ever.

Such we believe to be the true interpretation of the ordinance of the city of refuge. Were we to view it as bearing upon the case of a sinner taking refuge in CHRIST, it could only be in a very exceptional way, inasmuch as we should find ourselves surrounded, on all hands, by points of contrast rather than by points of similarity.

For in the first place, the manslayer, in the city of refuge, was not exempt from judgment, as we learn from Joshua 20:6. But for the believer in JESUS there is and can be no judgment, for the simplest of all reasons, that CHRIST has borne the judgment instead.

Again, there was a possibility of the slayer's falling into the hands of the avenger, if he ventured outside the gates of the city. The believer in JESUS can never perish; he is as safe as the Saviour himself.

Finally, as regards the slayer, it was a question of temporal safety and life in this world. As regards the believer in JESUS, it is a question of eternal salvation and life everlasting in the world to come. In fact, in almost every particular, it is striking contrast rather than similarity.

One grand point there is common to both, and that is, the point of exposure to imminent danger and the urgent need of fleeing for refuge. If it would have been wild folly on the part of the slayer to linger or hesitate for a moment, until he found himself safely lodged in the city of refuge, it is surely still wilder folly, yea, the very height of madness, on the part of the sinner, to linger or hesitate in coming to CHRIST.

The avenger might perhaps fail to lay hold on the slayer even though he were not in the city; but judgment must overtake the sinner out of CHRIST.

There is no possibility of escape, if there is the thickness of a gold leaf between the soul and CHRIST. Solemn thought! May it have its due weight in the heart of the reader who is yet in his sins! May he find no rest - not one moment's rest, until he has fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him in the Gospel. Judgment impends, certain, solemn judgment. It is not only that the avenger may come, but judgment must come upon all who are out of CHRIST.

Oh! unconverted, thoughtless, careless reader - should this volume fall into the hands of such - hear the warning voice! Flee for thy life! Tarry not, we entreat thee! Delay is madness. Every moment is precious. You know not the hour in the which you may be cut down, and consigned to that place in the which a single ray of hope, not even the faintest glimmer, can ever visit you - the place of eternal night, eternal woe, eternal torment - the place of a deathless worm and an unquenchable flame.

Beloved friend, do let us entreat thee, in these few closing lines of our volume, to come now, just as thou art, to JESUS, who stands with open arms and loving heart, ready to receive thee, to shelter, to save, and to bless, according to all the love of His heart, and the perfect efficacy of His name and His sacrifice. May GOD the Holy Spirit, by His own resistless energy, lead thee, just now, to come.

"Come unto me," says the loving Lord and Saviour, **"all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."** Precious words! May they fall, with divine power, upon many a weary heart!

Here we close our meditations upon this marvellous section of the volume of GOD; * and, in doing so, we are impressed with a profound sense of the depth and richness of the mine to which we have sought to conduct the reader, and also of the excessive feebleness and poverty of the suggestions which we have been enabled to offer. However, our confidence is in the living GOD, that He will, by His Holy Spirit, lead the heart and mind of the Christian reader into the enjoyment of His own precious truth, and thus fit him, more and more, for His service in these last evil days, that the name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST may be magnified, and His truth maintained in living power.

May GOD, in His abounding mercy, grant this, for JESUS CHRIST's sake!

* Chapter 36 has been referred to in our meditation on chapter 17.

C. H. M.

~ end of book ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
