

**NOTES**  
**ON**  
**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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*"Things new and old."*

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**Numbers 9**

**"And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the Passover at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at even, in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel" (Verses 1-5).**

There are three distinct positions in which we find this great redemption-feast celebrated, namely:

- in Egypt (Exodus 12);
- in the wilderness (Numbers 9);
- in the land of Canaan (Joshua 5).

Redemption lies at the foundation of everything connected with the history of GOD's people.

- are they to be delivered from the bondage, the death, and the darkness of Egypt? It is by redemption.
- are they to be borne along through all the difficulties and dangers of the desert? It is on the

ground of redemption.

- are they to walk across the ruins of the frowning walls of Jericho, and plant their feet upon the necks of the kings of Canaan? It is in virtue of redemption.

Thus the blood of the paschal lamb met the Israel of GOD and the deep degradation of the land of Egypt, and delivered them out of it. It met them in the dreary desert, and carried them through it. It met them on their entrance into the land of Canaan, and established them in it.

In a word, then, the blood of the lamb met the people in Egypt; it accompanied them through the desert; and planted them in Canaan.

It was the blessed basis of all the divine actings in them, with them, and for them.

- was it a question of the judgment of GOD against Egypt? The blood of the lamb screened them from it.

- was it a question of the numberless and nameless wants of the wilderness? The blood of the lamb secured a full provision for them.

- was it a question of the dreaded power of the seven nations of Canaan? The blood of the lamb was the sure and certain pledge of complete and glorious victory.

The moment we behold the Lord coming forth to act on behalf of His people, on the ground of the blood of the lamb, all is infallibly secured, from first to last. The whole of that mysterious and marvellous journey, from the brick kilns of Egypt to the vine clad hills and honeyed plains of Palestine, served but to illustrate and set forth the varied virtues of the blood of the lamb.

However, the chapter which now lies open before us presents the Passover entirely from a wilderness standpoint; and this will account to the reader for the introduction of the following circumstance:

**"There were certain men which were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the Passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day."**

Here was a practical difficulty - something abnormal, as we say - something not anticipated, and therefore the question was submitted to Moses and Aaron. **"They came before Moses"** - the exponent of the claims of GOD; **"and before Aaron"** - the exponent of the provisions of the grace of GOD. There seems something distinct and emphatic in the way in which both these functionaries are referred to. The two elements of which they are the expression would be deemed essential in the solving of such a difficulty as that which here presented itself.

**"And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the Lord in his appointed season among the children of Israel?"**

There was the plain confession as to the defilement; and the question raised was this: were they to be deprived of the holy privilege of coming before the Lord in His appointed way? Was there no resource, no provision for such a case?

A deeply interesting question surely, but one for which no answer had as yet been provided. We have no such case anticipated in the original institution, in Exodus 12; although we have there a very full statement of all the rites and all the ceremonies of the feast. It was reserved for the wilderness to evolve this new point. It was in the actual walk of the people - in the real practical details of desert life, that the difficulty presented itself for which a solution had to be provided. Hence it is that the record of this entire affair is appropriately given in Numbers, the book of the wilderness.

**"And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you."**

Lovely attitude! Moses had no answer to give; but he knew who had, and he waited on him. This was the very best and wisest thing for Moses to do. He did not pretend to be able to give an answer. He was not ashamed to say, "I do not know." With all his wisdom and knowledge, he did not hesitate to show his ignorance. This is true knowledge - true wisdom. It might be humiliating to one in Moses' position to appear before the congregation or any members of it, in the light of one ignorant on any question. He who had led the people out of Egypt, he who had conducted them through the Red Sea, he who had conversed with the Lord, and received his commission from the great "**I am**;" could it be possible that he was unable to meet a difficulty arising out of such a simple case as that which was now before him? Was it indeed true that such an one as Moses was ignorant as to the right course, in reference to men defiled by a dead body?

How few there are who, though not occupying such a lofty position as Moses, would not have attempted a reply of some sort to such a query. But Moses was the meekest man in all the earth. He knew better than to presume to speak when he had nothing to say. Would that we more faithfully followed his example in this matter! It would save us from many a sad exhibition, from many a blunder, from many a false attempt. Moreover it would tend to make us very much more real, more simple, more unaffected.

We are oft-times so silly as to be ashamed to expose our ignorance. We foolishly imagine that our reputation for wisdom and intelligence is touched when we give utterance to that fine sentence, so expressive of true moral greatness, "I don't know." It is a total mistake. We always attach much more weight and importance to the words of a man who never pretends to knowledge which he does not possess. But a man who is always ready to speak, in flippant self-confidence, we are never ready to hear.

Oh! to walk, at all times, in the spirit of these lovely words, "**Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command.**"

**"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body: or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the Passover unto the Lord. The fourteenth day of the second month, at even, they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs."**

There are two grand foundation truths set forth in the Passover, namely:

- redemption, and
- the unity of GOD's people.

These truths are unchangeable. Nothing can ever do away with them. Failure there may be, and unfaithfulness, in various forms; but those glorious truths of the eternal redemption and perfect unity of GOD's people remain in all their force and value. Hence that impressive ordinance which so vividly shadowed forth those truths was of perpetual obligation. Circumstances were not to interfere with it. Death or distance was not to interrupt it. **"If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet shall he keep the Passover unto the Lord."** So imperative indeed was it upon every member of the congregation to celebrate this feast, that a special provision is made in Numbers 9 for those who were not up to the mark of keeping it according to the due order. Such persons were to observe it **"on the fourteenth day of the second month."** This was the provision of grace for all cases of unavoidable defilement or distance.

If the reader will turn to II Chronicles 30 he will see that Hezekiah, and the congregation in his day, availed themselves of this gracious provision.

**"And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation . . . Then they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month"** (Ver. 13, 15).

The grace of GOD can meet us in our greatest possible weakness, if only that weakness be felt and confessed. \*

\* The reader will note with interest and profit, the contrast between the acting of Hezekiah, in II Chronicles 30, and the acting of Jeroboam, in I Kings 12:32. The former availed himself of the provisions of divine grace; the latter followed his own device. The second month was permitted of GOD; the eighth month was invented by man. Divine provisions meeting man's need, and human inventions opposing GOD's Word, are totally different things.

But let not this most precious and comfortable truth lead us to trifle with sin or defilement. Though grace permitted the second month, instead of the first, it did not, on that account, allow any laxity as to the rites and ceremonies of the feast. **"The unleavened bread and bitter herbs"** were always to have their place; none of the sacrifice was to remain till the morning, nor was a single bone of it to be broken. GOD cannot allow any lowering of the standard of truth or holiness. Man, through weakness, failure, or the power of circumstances, might be behind the time; but he must not be below the mark. Grace permitted the former; holiness forbids the latter; and if any one had presumed upon the grace to dispense with the holiness, he would have been cut off from the congregation.

Has this no voice for us! Assuredly it has. We must ever remember, as we pass along through the pages of this marvellous Book of Numbers, that the things which happened unto Israel are our types, and that it is, at once, our duty and our privilege to hang over these types and seek to understand the holy lessons which they are designed of GOD to teach.

What then are we to learn from the regulations with respect to the Passover, in the second month!

Why was Israel so specially enjoined not to omit a single rite or ceremony on that particular occasion? Why is it that, in this ninth chapter of Numbers, the directions for the second month are much more minute than those for the first? It is not surely that the ordinance was more important in the one case than in the other, for its importance, in GOD's judgment, was ever the same. Neither is it that there was a shade of difference in the order, in either case, for that, too, was ever the same. Still the fact must strike the reader who ponders the chapter before us, that where reference is made to the celebration of the Passover in the first month, we simply read the words, "**according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it.**"

But, on the other hand, when reference is made to the second month, we have a most minute statement of what those rites and ceremonies were:

**"They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it"** (Compare verse 3 with 11, 12).

What, we ask, does this plain fact teach us? We believe it teaches us, most distinctly, that we are never to lower the standard, in the things of GOD, because of failure and weakness on the part of GOD's people; but rather, on that very account, to take special pains to hold the standard up, in all its divine integrity. No doubt, there should be the deep sense of failure - the deeper the better; but GOD's truth is not to be surrendered. We can always reckon, with confidence, upon the resources of divine grace, while seeking to maintain, with unwavering decision, the standard of divine truth.

Let us seek to keep this ever in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts. We are in danger, on the one hand, of forgetting the fact that failure has come in - yes, gross failure, unfaithfulness, and sin. And, on the other hand, we are in danger of forgetting, in view of that failure, the unfailing faithfulness of GOD, in spite of everything. The professing Church has failed, and become a perfect ruin; and not only so, but we ourselves have individually failed and helped on the ruin. We should feel all this - feel it deeply - feel it constantly. We should ever bear upon our spirits before our GOD the deep and heart-subduing consciousness of how sadly and how shamefully we have behaved ourselves in the house of GOD. It would be adding immensely to our failure were we ever to forget that we have failed. The most profound humility and the deepest brokenness of spirit become us in the remembrance of all this; and these inward feelings and exercises will surely express themselves in a lowly walk and carriage in the midst of the scene in which we move.

**"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity"** (II Timothy 2:19).

Here is the resource of the faithful, in view of the ruins of Christendom. GOD never fails, never

changes, and we have simply to depart from iniquity, and cling to Him. we are to do what is right, and follow it diligently, and leave results to Him.

We would earnestly beg of the reader to give the foregoing line of thought his entire attention.

We want him to pause, for a few moments, and prayerfully consider the whole subject. We are convinced that a due consideration of it, in its two sides, would greatly help us to pick our steps amid the surrounding ruins. The remembrance of the Church's condition, and of our own personal unfaithfulness, would keep us humble; while, at the same time, the apprehension of GOD's unchanging standard, and of His unswerving faithfulness, would detach us from the evil around, and keep us steady in the path of separation. Both together would effectually preserve us from empty pretension, on the one hand, and from laxity and indifference, on the other. We have ever to keep before our souls the humbling fact that we have failed, and yet to hold fast that grand truth that GOD is faithful.

These are, pre-eminently, lessons for the wilderness - lessons for this very day - lessons for us. They are suggested, very forcibly, by the inspired record of the Passover in the second month - a record peculiar to the Book of Numbers - the great wilderness book. It is in the wilderness that human failure comes so fully out; and in the wilderness the infinite resources of divine grace are displayed. But once more, let us reiterate the statement and may it be engraved, in characters deep and broad, on our hearts - the richest provisions of divine grace and mercy afford no warrant whatever for lowering the standard of divine truth. If any had pleaded defilement or distance as an excuse for not keeping the Passover, or for keeping it otherwise than as GOD had enjoined, he would, most assuredly, have been cut off from the congregation. And so with us, if we consent to surrender any truth of GOD, because failure has come in - if we, in sheer unbelief of heart, give up GOD's standard, and abandon GOD's ground - if we draw a plea from the condition of things around us to shake off the authority of GOD's truth over the conscience, or its formative influence upon our conduct and character - it is very evident that our communion is suspended. \*

\* Let it be noted here once for all, that the cutting off of any one from the congregation of Israel, answers to the suspension of a believer's communion because of unjudged sin.

We would gladly pursue this great practical line of truth somewhat further, but we must forbear, and close this part of our subject by quoting for our reader the remainder of this wilderness record concerning the Passover.

**"But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the Passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin. And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the Passover unto the Lord; according to the ordinance of the Passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land" (Verses 13, 14).**

The willful neglect of the Passover would argue, on the part of the Israelite, a total want of

appreciation of the benefits and blessings coming out of his redemption and deliverance from the land of Egypt. The more deeply any one entered into the divine reality of that which had been accomplished on that memorable night, in the which the congregation of Israel found refuge and repose beneath the shelter of the blood, the more earnestly would he long for the return of "**the fourteenth day of the first month**," that he might have an opportunity of commemorating that glorious occasion; and if there was anything preventing his enjoying the ordinance in "**the first month**" the more gladly and thankfully would he avail himself of "**the second**." But the man who could be satisfied to go on from year to year, without keeping the Passover, only proved that his heart was far away from the GOD of Israel. It were worse than vain for any one to speak of loving the GOD of his fathers, and of enjoying the blessings of redemption, while the very ordinance which GOD had appointed to set forth that redemption lay neglected from year to year.

And may we not, to a certain extent, apply all this to ourselves, in reference to the matter of the Lord's supper? Doubtless we may, and that with very much profit. There is this connection between the Passover and the Lord's supper, that the former was the type, the latter the memorial, of the death of CHRIST.

Thus we read in I Corinthians 5. "**Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.**" This sentence establishes the connection. The Passover was the memorial of Israel's redemption from the bondage of Egypt; and the Lord's supper is the memorial of the Church's redemption from the heavier and darker bondage of sin and Satan. Hence, as every true and faithful Israelite would surely be found keeping the Passover, in the appointed season, according to all the rites and ceremonies thereof, so will every true and faithful Christian be found celebrating the Lord's supper, in its appointed season, and according to all the principles laid down in the New Testament respecting it. If an Israelite had neglected the Passover, even on one single occasion, he would have been cut off from the congregation. Such neglect was not to be tolerated in the assembly of old. It was instantly visited with the divine displeasure.

And, may we not ask in the face of this solemn fact, is it nothing now - is it a matter of no moment for Christians to neglect, from week to week, and month to month, the supper of their Lord? Are we to suppose that the One who, in Numbers 9, declared that the neglecter of the Passover should be cut off, takes no account of the neglecter of the Lord's table? We cannot believe it for a moment. For, albeit it is not a question of being cut off from the Church of GOD, the body of CHRIST, are we, on that account, to be negligent? Far be the thought. Yea, rather should it have the blessed effect of stirring us up to greater diligence in the celebration of that most precious feast wherein "**we do show the Lord's death till he come.**"

To a pious Israelite there was nothing like the Passover, because it was the memorial of his redemption. And, to a pious Christian, there is nothing like the Lord's supper, because it is the memorial of his redemption and of the death of his Lord. Of all the exercises in which the Christian can engage, there is nothing more precious, nothing more expressive, nothing that brings CHRIST more touchingly or solemnly before his heart, than the Lord's supper. He may sing about the Lord's death, he may pray about it, he may read about it, he may hear about it; but it is only in the supper that he "**shows**" it forth. "**And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new**

**testament in my blood, which is shed for you"** (Luke 22:19, 20).

Here we have the feast instituted; and, when we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, we read that, **"upon the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread"** (Acts 20:7).

Here we have the feast celebrated; and, lastly, when we turn to the Epistles, we read, **"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of CHRIST? For we, being many, are one loaf, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf"** (I Corinthians 10:16, 17).

And again, **"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come"** (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

Here we have the feast expounded. And may we not say that, in the institution, the celebration, and the exposition, we have a threefold cord, not easily broken, to bind our souls to this most precious feast?

How is it, then, that in the face of all this holy authority, any of GOD's people should be found neglecting the Lord's table? Or, looking at it in another aspect, how is it that any of CHRIST's members can be satisfied to go on for weeks, and months, and some all their days, without ever remembering their Lord in the way of His own direct and positive appointment? We are aware that some professing Christians regard this subject in the light of a return to Jewish ordinances, and as a coming down from the high ground of the Church. They look upon the Lord's supper and baptism as inward spiritual mysteries; and they consider that we are departing from true spirituality in insisting upon the literal observance of these ordinances.

To all this we very simply reply that GOD is wiser than we are. If the Lord CHRIST instituted the supper; if GOD the Holy Ghost led the early Church to celebrate it; and if He has also expounded it unto us, who are we that we should set up our ideas in opposition to GOD? No doubt, the Lord's supper should be an inward spiritual mystery to all who partake of it; but it is also an outward, literal, tangible thing. There is literal bread, and literal wine - literal eating, and literal drinking. If any deny this, they may, with equal force, deny that there are literal people gathered together. We have no right to explain away Scripture after such a fashion. It is our happy and holy duty to submit to Scripture, to bow down, absolutely and implicitly, to its divine authority.

Nor is it merely a question of subjection to the authority of Scripture. It is that, most assuredly, as we have abundantly proved by quotation after quotation from the divine word; and that alone is simply sufficient for every pious mind. But there is more than this. There is such a thing as the response of love in the heart of the Christian, answering to the love of the heart of CHRIST. Is not this something? Ought we not to seek, in some small degree, to meet the love of such a heart? If our blessed and adorable Lord has, in very deed, appointed the bread and the wine, in the supper, as memorials of His broken body and shed blood; if He has ordained that we should



eat of that bread and drink of that cup, in remembrance of Him, ought we not, in the power of responsive affection, to meet the desire of His loving heart? Surely no earnest Christian will question this. It ought ever to be the very joy of our hearts to gather round the table of our loving Lord, and remember Him in the way of His appointment - to show forth His death till He come. It is only marvellous to think that He should seek a place in the remembrance of such hearts as ours; but so it is; and it would be sad indeed if we, on any ground, and for any reason whatsoever, should neglect that very feast with which He has linked His precious name.

This, of course, would not be the place to enter upon anything like an elaborate exposition of the ordinance of the Lord's supper. We have sought to do this elsewhere. What we specially desire here is, to urge upon the Christian reader the immense importance and deep interest of the ordinance as viewed on the double ground of subjection to the authority of Scripture, and responsive love to CHRIST Himself. And, furthermore, we are anxious to impress all who may read these lines with a sense of the seriousness of neglecting to eat the Lord's supper, according to the Scriptures. We may depend upon it, it is dangerous ground for any to attempt to set aside this positive institution of our Lord and Master. It argues a wrong condition of soul altogether. It proves that the conscience is not subject to the authority of the Word, and that the heart is not in true sympathy with the affections of CHRIST. Let us therefore see to it that we are honestly endeavouring to discharge our holy responsibilities to the table of the Lord - that we forbear not to keep the feast - that we celebrate it according to the order laid down by GOD the Holy Ghost.

Thus much as to the Passover in the wilderness, and the impressive lessons which it conveys to our souls.

We shall now dwell for a few moments on the closing paragraph of our chapter, which is as truly characteristic as any portion of the book. In it we are called to contemplate a numerous host of men, women, and children, travelling through a trackless wilderness, "**where there was no way**" - passing over a dreary waste, a vast sandy desert, without compass or human guide.

What a thought! What a spectacle! There were those millions of people moving along without any knowledge of the route by which they were to travel, as wholly dependent upon GOD for guidance as for food and all beside; a thoroughly helpless pilgrim host. They could form no plans for the morrow. when encamped, they knew not when they were to march; and when on the march, they knew not when or where they were to halt.

Theirs was a life of daily and hourly dependence. They had to look up for guidance. Their movements were controlled by the wheels of the Lord's chariot.

This truly was a wondrous spectacle. Let us read the record of it, and drink into our souls its heavenly teaching.

**"And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the Lord the children of**

**Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (Verses 15-23).**

A more lovely picture of absolute dependence upon, and subjection to, divine guidance it were impossible to conceive than that presented in the foregoing paragraph. There was not a footprint or a landmark throughout that "**great and terrible wilderness.**" It was therefore useless to look for any guidance from those who had gone before. They were wholly cast upon GOD for every step of the way. They were in a position of constant waiting upon Him. This, to an unsubdued mind - an unbroken will - would be intolerable; but to a soul knowing, loving, confiding, and delighting in GOD, nothing could be more deeply blessed.

Here lies the real gist of the whole matter. Is GOD known, loved, and trusted? If He be, the heart will delight in the most absolute dependence upon Him. If not, such dependence would be perfectly insufferable. The unrenewed man loves to think Himself independent - loves to fancy himself free - loves to believe that he may do what he likes, go where he likes, say what he likes. Alas! it is the merest delusion.

Man is not free. He is the slave of Satan. It is now well nigh six thousand years since he sold himself into the hands of that great spiritual slave holder who has held him ever since, and who holds him still. Yes, Satan holds the natural man - the unconverted, unrepentant man in terrible bondage. He has him bound hand and foot with chains and fetters which are not seen in their true character because of the gilding wherewith he has so artfully covered them. Satan rules man by means of his lusts, his passions, and his pleasures. He forms lusts in the heart, and then gratifies them with the things that are in the world, and man vainly imagines himself free because he can gratify his desires. But it is a melancholy delusion; and, sooner or later, it will be found to be such. There is no freedom save that with which CHRIST makes His people free. He it is who says, "**Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**" And again, "**If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed**" (John 8).

Here is true liberty. It is the liberty which the new nature finds in walking in the Spirit, and doing those things that are pleasing in the sight of GOD. The service of the Lord is perfect freedom. But this service, in all its departments, involves the most simple dependence upon the living GOD. Thus it was with the only true and perfect Servant that ever trod this earth. He was ever dependent. Every movement, every act, every word - all He did, and all He left undone - was the fruit of the most absolute dependence upon, and subjection to, GOD. He moved when GOD would have Him move, and stood still when GOD would have Him stand. He spoke when GOD

would have Him speak, and was silent when GOD would have Him silent.

Such was JESUS when He lived in this world; and we, as partakers of His nature - His life, and having His Spirit dwelling in us are called to walk in His steps, and live a life of simple dependence upon GOD, from day to day. Of this life of dependence, in one special phase of it, we have a graphic and beautiful type at the close of our chapter. The Israel of GOD - the camp in the desert - that pilgrim host followed the movement of the cloud. They had to look up for guidance. This is man's proper work. He was made to turn his countenance upward, in contrast with the brute, who is formed to look downward. \*

\* The Greek word for man (*anthropos*) signifies to turn the face upwards.

Israel could form no plans. They could never say, "**To-morrow we shall go to such a place.**" They were entirely dependent upon the movement of the cloud. Thus it was with Israel, and thus it should be with us. We are passing through a trackless desert - a moral wilderness. There is absolutely no way. We should not know how to walk, or where to go, were it not for that one most precious, most deep, most comprehensive sentence which fell from the lips of our blessed Lord, "**I am the way.**"

Here is divine infallible guidance. We are to follow Him. "**I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life**" (John 8). This is living guidance. It is not acting according to the letter of certain rules and regulations; it is following a living CHRIST; walking as He walked; doing as He did; imitating His example in all things. This is Christian movement - Christian action. It is keeping the eye fixed upon JESUS, and having the features, traits, and lineaments of His character imprinted on our new nature, and reflected back or reproduced in our daily life and ways.

Now this will, assuredly, involve the surrender of our own will, our own plans, our own management altogether. We must follow the cloud; we must wait ever wait only upon GOD. We cannot say, "We shall go here or there, do this or that, to-morrow, or next week." All our movements must be placed under the regulating power of that one commanding sentence - often alas! lightly penned and uttered by us - "**If the Lord will.**"

Oh! that we better understood all this! Would that we knew more perfectly the meaning of divine guidance! How often do we vainly imagine, and confidently assert, that the cloud is moving in that very direction which suits the bent of our inclination. We want to do a certain thing, or make a certain movement, and we seek to persuade ourselves that our will is the will of GOD. Thus, instead of being divinely guided, we are self-deceived. Our will is unbroken, and hence we cannot be guided aright, for the real secret of being rightly guided - guided of GOD - is to have our own will thoroughly subdued.

"**The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.**" And again, "**I will guide thee with mine eye.**" But let us ponder the admonition, "**Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee**" (Psalm 32). If the countenance be turned upwards to catch the movement of the divine "**eye,**" we shall not need the "**bit and bridle.**" But here is precisely the point in which we so sadly fail. We do not live sufficiently near to GOD to discern

the movement of His eye. The will is at work. We want to have our own way, and hence we are left to reap the bitter fruits thereof.

Thus it was with Jonah. he was told to go to Nineveh but he wanted to go to Tarshish; and circumstances seemed to favour; providence seemed to point in the direction of his will. But alas! he had to find his place in the belly of the whale, yea, in "**the belly of hell**" itself, where "**the weeds were wrapped about his head.**" It was there he learnt the bitterness of following his own will. He had to be taught in the depths of the ocean the true meaning of the "**bit and bridle,**" because he would not follow the gentler guidance of the eye.

But our GOD is so gracious, so tender, so patient! He will teach and He will guide His poor feeble erring children. He spares no pains with us. He occupies Himself continually about us, in order that we may be kept from our own ways, which are full of thorns and briars, and walk in His ways, which are pleasantness and peace.

There is nothing in all this world more deeply blessed than to lead a life of habitual dependence upon GOD; to hang upon Him, moment by moment, to wait on Him and cling to Him for everything. To have all our springs in Him. It is the true secret of peace, and of holy independence of the creature. The soul that can really say, "**All my springs are in thee**" is lifted above all creature confidences, human hopes, and earthly expectations.

It is not that GOD does not use the creature, in a thousand ways, to minister to us. We do not at all mean this. He does use the creature; but if we lean upon the creature instead of leaning upon Him, we shall very speedily get leanness and barrenness into our souls. There is a vast difference between GOD's using the creature to bless us, and our leaning on the creature to the exclusion of Him. In the one case, we are blessed and He is glorified; in the other, we are disappointed and He is dishonoured.

It is well that the soul should deeply and seriously consider this distinction. We believe it is constantly overlooked. We imagine, oft-times, that we are leaning upon, and looking to, GOD, when, in reality, if we would only look honestly at the roots of things, and judge ourselves in the immediate presence of GOD, we should find an appalling amount of the leaven of creature confidence. How often do we speak of living by faith, and of trusting only in GOD, when, at the same time, if we would only look down into the depths of our hearts, we should find there a large measure of dependence upon circumstances, reference to second causes, and the like.

Christian reader, let us look well to this. Let us see to it that our eye is fixed upon the living GOD alone, and not upon man whose breath is in his nostrils. let us wait on Him - wait patiently - wait constantly. If we are at a loss for anything, let our direct and simple reference be to Him. Are we at a loss to know our way, to know whither we should turn, what step we should take? let us remember that He has said, "**I am the way;**" let us follow Him. He will make all clear, bright, and certain. There can be no darkness, no perplexity, no uncertainty, if we are following Him; for He has said, and we are bound to believe, "**He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.**" Hence, therefore, if we are in darkness, it is certain that we are not following Him. No darkness can ever settle down upon that blessed path along which GOD leads those who, with a single eye, seek to follow JESUS.

But some one, whose eye scans these lines, may say, or at least may feel disposed to say, "Well, after all, I am in perplexity as to my path. I really do not know which way to turn or what step to take."

If this be the language of the reader, we would simply ask him this one question, "art thou following JESUS? If so, thou canst not be in perplexity. Art thou following the cloud? If so, thy way is as plain as GOD can make it." Here lies the root of the whole matter. Perplexity or uncertainty is very often the fruit of the working of the will. we are bent upon doing something which GOD does not want us to do at all - upon going somewhere that GOD does not want us to go. We pray about it, and get no answer. We pray again and again, and get no answer. How is this? Why the simple fact is that GOD wants us to be quiet - to stand still - to remain just where we are. Wherefore, instead of racking our brain and harassing our souls about what we ought to do, let us do nothing, but simply wait on GOD.

This is the secret of peace and calm elevation.

If an Israelite, in the desert, had taken it into his head to make some movement, independent of the Lord; if he took it upon Him to move when the cloud was at rest, or to halt while the cloud was moving, we can easily see what the result would have been. And so it will ever be with us. If we move when we ought to rest, or rest when we ought to move, we shall not have the divine presence with us.

**"At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed."**

They were kept in constant waiting upon GOD, the most blessed position that any one can occupy; But it must be occupied ere its blessedness can be tasted. It is a reality to be known, not a mere theory to be talked of. May it be ours to prove it all our journey through!

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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