

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 16

The chapter on which we have just been dwelling, is what may be called a digression from the history of Israel's wilderness life, except indeed the short paragraph respecting the Sabbath-breaker, it looks forward into the future, when, spite of all their sin and folly, their murmuring and rebellion, Israel shall possess the land of Canaan, and offer sacrifices of righteousness and songs of praise to the GOD of their salvation. In it we have seen the Lord rising far above all the unbelief and disobedience, the pride and wilfulness exhibited in Numbers 13 and Numbers 14, and looking on to the full and final accomplishment of His own eternal purpose, and the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But in chapter 16 the wilderness story is resumed - that sad and humbling story, so far as man is concerned; but a bright and blessed story of the exhaustless patience and boundless grace of GOD.

These are the two grand lessons of the wilderness.

- we learn what man is, and
- we learn what GOD is.

The two things lie side by side on the pages of the Book of Numbers.

- in chapter 14 we have man and his ways.

- in chapter 15 we have GOD and His ways. And now,
- in the chapter which opens before us, we come back to man and his ways again.

May we reap much deep and solid instruction from the double lesson!

"Now Korah, the son of Ishar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" Verses 1-3).

Here then we enter upon the solemn history of what the Holy Ghost, by the Apostle Jude, terms "The gainsaying of Core."

The rebellion is attributed to Korah, inasmuch as he was the religious leader in it. He seems to have possessed sufficient influence to gather around him a large number of influential men "**princes, famous men, and men of renown.**" In short, it was a very formidable and serious rebellion; and we shall do well to look closely at its source and moral features.

It is always a most critical moment in the history of an assembly when a spirit of disaffection displays itself; for, if it be not met in the right way, the most disastrous consequences are sure to follow.

There are materials in every assembly capable of being acted upon, and it only needs some restless master spirit to arise, in order to work on such materials, and fan into a devouring flame the fire that has been smouldering in secret. There are hundreds and thousands ready to flock around the standard of revolt, when once it has been raised, who have neither the vigour nor the courage to raise it themselves. It is not every one that Satan will take up as an instrument in such work. It needs a shrewd, clever, energetic man - a man of moral power - one possessing influence over the minds of his fellows, and an iron will to carry forward his schemes.

No doubt Satan infuses much of all these into the men whom he uses in his diabolical undertakings. At all events, we know, as a fact, that the great leaders in all rebellious movements are generally men of master minds, capable of swaying, according to their own will, the fickle multitude, which, like the ocean, is acted upon by every stormy mind that blows. Such men know how, in the first place, to stir the passions of the people; and, in the second place, how to wield them, when stirred. Their most potent agency - the leper with which they can most effectually raise the masses - is some question as to their liberty and their rights.

If they can only succeed in persuading people that their liberty is curtailed, and their rights infringed, they are sure to gather a number of restless spirits around them, and do a vast deal of serious mischief.

Thus it was in the matter of Korah and his coadjutors. They sought to make it appear that Moses and Aaron were lording it over their brethren, and interfering with their rights and privileges as

members of a holy congregation, in which, according to their judgment, all were on a dead level, and one had as much right to be active as another.

"Ye take too much upon you."

Such was their charge against **"the meekest man in all the earth."** But what had Moses taken upon him? Surely the most cursory glance back at the history of that dear and honoured servant would have been sufficient to convince any impartial person that, so far from taking dignity and responsibility upon him, he had shown himself only too ready to shrink from them when presented, and sink under them when imposed. Hence, therefore, any one who could think of accusing Moses of taking upon him, only proved himself totally ignorant of the man's real spirit and character. Assuredly the one who could say to Joshua, **"Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!"** was not very likely to take much upon him.

But, on the other hand, if GOD calls one a man into prominence - if he qualifies him for work - if He fills and fits the vessel for special service - if He assigns a man his position - then of what possible use can it be for any one to quarrel with divine gift, and divine appointment? In truth, nothing can be more absurd. **"A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven."** And therefore it must prove worse than useless for any one to assume to be or have anything, for all such assumption must prove hollow in the end. Men will, sooner or later, find their level; and nothing will stand but what is of GOD.

Korah and his company, therefore, were quarrelling with GOD and not with Moses and Aaron.

These latter had been called of GOD to occupy a certain position, and to do a certain work, and woe be to them if they refused. It was not they who had aimed at the position or assumed the work; they were ordained of GOD. This ought to have settled the question; and it would have settled it for all save restless, self-occupied rebels, who sought to undermine the true servants of GOD in order to exalt themselves.

This is always the way with the promoters of sedition or disaffection. Their real object is to make themselves somebody. They talk loudly and very plausibly about the common rights and privileges of GOD's people; but, in reality, they themselves are aiming at a position for which they are in no way qualified; and at privileges to which they have no right.

In point of fact, the matter is as simple as possible. Has GOD given a man his place to fill - his work to do? Who will question this? Well, then, let each one know his place and fill it - know his work and do it.

It is the most senseless thing in the world for one to attempt to occupy another's post or do another's work. We were led to see this, very distinctly, when meditating on Numbers 3 and Numbers 4, it must ever hold good. Korah had his work; Moses had his. Why should one envy another? It would be quite as reasonable to charge the sun, moon, and stars with taking too much upon them, when they shine in their appointed spheres, as to charge any gifted servant of CHRIST therewith, when he seeks to discharge the responsibility which his gift, most surely, imposes upon him. These luminaries serve in the place assigned them by the hand of the

almighty Creator; and so long as CHRIST's servants do the same, it is charging them falsely to say that they take too much upon them.

Now this principle is of immense importance, in every assembly, large or small - under all circumstances where Christians are called to work together. It is a mistake to suppose that all the members of the body of CHRIST are called to places of prominence; or that any member can select his place in the body. It is wholly and absolutely a matter of divine appointment.

This is the clear teaching of I Corinthians 12.

"The body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased Him" (Verses 14-18).

Here lies the true, the only true source of ministry in the Church of GOD - the body of CHRIST. **"God hath set the members."** It is not one man appointing another; still less is it a man appointing himself. It is divine appointment or nothing, yea, worse than nothing, a daring usurpation of divine rights.

Now, looking at the subject in the light of that marvellous illustration of I Corinthians 12 what sense would there be in the feet charging the hands, or the ears charging the eyes, with taking too much upon them? Would not the notion be preposterous in the extreme? True, those members occupy a prominent place in the body; but why do they? Because GOD has set them there, **"as it pleased him."** And what are they doing in that prominent place? They are doing the work which GOD has given them to do. And to what end? The good of the whole body. There is not a single member, however obscure, that does not derive positive benefit from the duly discharged functions of the prominent member. And, on the other hand, the prominent member is a debtor to the duly discharged functions of the obscure one. Let the eyes lose their power of vision, and every member will feel it. Let there be functional derangement in the most trivial member, and the most honourable member will suffer.

Hence, therefore, it is not a question of taking upon us much or little, but of doing our appointed work, and filling our appointed place.

It is by the effectual working of all the members, according to the measure of every part, that the edification of the whole body is promoted. If this great truth be not seized and carried out, edification, so far from being promoted, is most positively hindered, the Holy Ghost is quenched and grieved; the sovereign rights of CHRIST are denied; and GOD is dishonoured.

Every Christian is responsible to act on this divine principle, and to testify against everything that practically denies it. The fact of the ruin of the professing Church is no reason whatever for abandoning the truth of GOD, or sanctioning any denial of it. The Christian is always solemnly bound to submit himself to the revealed mind of GOD. To plead circumstances as an excuse for doing wrong, or for neglecting any truth of GOD, is simply flying in the face of divine authority,

and making GOD the Author of our disobedience.

But we cannot pursue this subject further. We have merely referred to it here in connection with our chapter, with which we must now proceed. It is undoubtedly a most solemn page of Israel's wilderness story.

Korah and his company were very speedily taught the folly and sin of their rebellious movement.

They were awfully wrong in daring to set themselves up against the true servants of the living GOD. As to Moses, the man against whom they were gathered together, when he heard their seditious words, "**he fell upon his face.**"

This was a very good way to meet rebels. We have seen this beloved servant of GOD on his face when he ought to have been on his feet (Exodus 14). But here it was about the best and safest thing he could do. There is never much use in contending with restless and disaffected people; better far leave them in the Lord's hands; for with Him, in reality, is their controversy.

If GOD sets a man in a certain position, and gives him a certain work to do, and his fellows think proper to quarrel with him, simply on the score of his doing that work, and filling that position, then is their quarrel really with GOD, who knows how to settle it, and will do it in His own way. The assurance of this gives holy calmness and moral elevation to the Lord's servant, in moments when envious and turbulent spirits rise up against him.

It is hardly possible for any one to occupy a prominent place of service, or to be pre-eminently used of GOD, without, at some time or another, having to encounter the attacks of certain radical and discontented men, who cannot bear to see any one more honoured than themselves. But the true way to meet such is to take the place of utter prostration and nothingness, and allow the tide of disaffection to roll over one.

"And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face. And he spake unto Korah and all his company, saying, Even to-morrow the Lord will show [not Moses will show] who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom He hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; take you censers, Korah and all his company; and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi" (Verses 4-7).

This was placing the matter in the proper hands. Moses gives great prominence to the sovereign rights of the Lord. "**The Lord will show**" and "**The Lord will choose.**" There is not a syllable about himself or Aaron.

The whole question hinges upon the Lord's choice and the Lord's appointment. The two hundred and fifty rebels are brought face to face with the living GOD. They are summoned into His presence, with their censers in their hands, in order that the whole matter may be thoroughly gone into, and definitely settled before that grand tribunal from which there can be no appeal. It would, obviously, have been of no possible use for Moses and Aaron to attempt to give judgment, inasmuch as they were defendants in the cause. But Moses was blessedly willing to

have all parties summoned into the divine presence, there to have their matters judged and determined.

This was true humility and true wisdom. It is always well, when people are seeking a place, to let them have it, to their hearts content; for most assuredly, the very place after which they have foolishly aspired will be the scene of their signal defeat and deplorable confusion.

You may sometimes see men envying others in a certain sphere of service, and longing to occupy that sphere themselves. let them try it; and they are sure, in the end, to break down and retire covered with shame and confusion of face. The Lord will surely confound all such. There is no use in man trying to do it; and hence it is always best for such as may happen to be the objects of envious attack just to fall on their faces before GOD, and let Him settle the question with the malcontents. It is most sad when such scenes occur in the history of GOD's people; but they have occurred; they do occur; and they may occur again and again; and we feel assured that the very best plan is to let men of a restless, ambitious, disaffected spirit run to the full length of their tether, and then they are sure to be pulled up.

It is, in point of fact, to leave them in the hands of GOD, who will most surely deal with them in His own perfect way.

"And Moses said unto Korah, hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near unto him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the Priesthood also? For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against Him?" (Verses 8-11).

Here we are conducted to the very root of this terrible conspiracy. We see the man who originated it, and the object at which he aimed.

Moses addresses Korah, and charges him with aiming at the priesthood. Let the reader carefully note this. It is important that he should have this point clearly before his mind, according to the teaching of Scripture. He must see what Korah was - what his work was - and what the object of his restless ambition was. He must see all these things if he would understand the true force and meaning of Jude's expression, "**the gainsaying of Core.**"

What then was Korah? He was a Levite, and, as such, he was entitled to minister and to teach: "**They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law.**" "**The God of Israel hath brought you near to himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them.**" Such was Korah, and such his sphere of work. At what did he aim? At the priesthood. "**Seek ye the priesthood also?**"

Now, to a cursory observer it might not have appeared that Korah was seeking anything for himself. He seemed to be contending for the rights of the whole assembly. But Moses, by the Spirit of GOD, unmask the man, and shows that, under the plausible pretext of standing up for the common rights of the congregation, he was audaciously seeking the priesthood for himself.

It is well to note this. It will most generally be found that loud talkers about the liberties, rights, and privileges of GOD's people are, in reality, seeking their own exaltation and advantage. Not content with doing their proper work, they are seeking an improper place. This is not always apparent; but GOD is sure to make it manifest sooner or later, for "**by him actions are weighed.**" Nothing can be more worthless than seeking a place for oneself. It is sure to end in disappointment and confusion. The grand thing for each one is to be found filling his appointed place and doing his appointed work; and the more humbly, quietly, and unpretendingly, the better.

But Korah had not learnt this simple but wholesome principle. He was not content with his divinely appointed place and service, But aimed at something which did not belong to him at all. He aimed at being a priest. His sin was the sin of rebellion against GOD's high priest. This was "**the gainsaying of Core.**"

It is important to seize this fact in Korah's history. It is not generally understood; and hence it is that his sin is charged, now-a-days, upon those who seek to exercise any gift which may have been bestowed upon them by the Head of the Church. But a moment's calm reflection upon the subject in the light of Scripture would be quite sufficient to show how utterly baseless is such a charge.

Take, for example, a man to whom CHRIST has manifestly given the gift of an evangelist. Are we to suppose him guilty of the sin of Korah because, in pursuance of the divine gift and the divine commission, he goes forth to preach the Gospel? Should he preach? or should he not preach? Is the divine gift - the divine call - sufficient. Is he acting as a rebel when he preaches the Gospel?

So also as regards a pastor or teacher. Is he guilty of the sin of Korah, because he exercises the special gift imparted to him by the Head of the Church? Does not CHRIST's gift make a man a minister? Is anything further necessary? is it not plain to any unprejudiced mind - to any one willing to be taught by Scripture - that the possession of a divinely imparted gift makes a man a minister, without anything further whatsoever? And is it not equally plain that, though a man had everything else that could be had, and yet had no gift from the Head of the Church, he is no minister? We confess we do not see how these plain propositions can be called in question.

We are speaking, be it remembered, of special gifts of ministry in the Church.

No doubt, every member in the body of CHRIST has some ministry to fulfil, some work to do. This is understood by every well-instructed Christian; and, moreover, it is clear that the edification of the body is carried on, not merely by some special prominent gifts, but by the effectual working of all the members in their respective places, as we read in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 16).

All this is as plain as Scripture can make it. But, as to any special gifts, such as that of evangelist, pastor, prophet, or teacher, it must be received from CHRIST alone; and the possession of it makes a man a minister, without anything further. And, on the other hand, all the education and all the human authority under the sun could not make a man an evangelist, a pastor, or teacher, unless he has a bona fide gift from the Head of the Church.

Thus much as to ministry in the Church of GOD. We trust enough has been said to prove to the reader that it is a very grave mistake indeed to charge men with the awful sin of Korah because they exercise those gifts which have been imparted to them by the great Head of the Church. In point of fact it would be a sin not to exercise them.

But there is a very material difference between ministry and priesthood. Korah did not aim at being a minister, for that he was. He aimed at being a priest, which he could not be.

The priesthood was vested in Aaron and his family; and it was a daring usurpation for any one else, no matter who, to attempt to offer sacrifice, or discharge any other priestly function. Now, Aaron was a type of our great High Priest who is passed into the heavens - JESUS the Son of GOD. Heaven is the sphere of His ministry. **"If he were on earth he should not be a priest"** (Hebrews 8:4). **"Our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."** There is no such thing as a priest on earth now, save in the sense in which all believers are priests. Thus we read in Peter, **"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood"** (I Peter 2:9).

Every Christian is a priest in this sense of the term. The very feeblest saint in the Church of GOD is as much a priest as Paul was. It is not a question of capacity or spiritual power, but simply of position. All believers are priests, and they are called to offer spiritual sacrifices, according to Hebrews 13:15, 16: **"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."**

This is the Christian priesthood. And let the reader note it carefully, that to aim at any other form of priesthood than this - to assume any other priestly function - to set up a certain priestly class - a sacerdotal caste - a number of men to act on behalf of their fellows - or discharge priestly service for them before GOD - this is, in principle, the sin of Korah. We only speak of the principle; not of persons. The germ of the sin is as distinct as possible. By and by there will be the full blown fruit.

The reader cannot possibly be too simple in apprehending this entire subject. It is, we may truly say, of capital importance, at this moment. Let him examine it only in the light of Holy Scripture. Tradition will not do. Ecclesiastical history will not do. It must be GOD's Word alone. In the light of that Word let the question be asked and answered, "Who are justly chargeable with the sin of Korah? Is it those who seek to exercise whatever gifts the Head of the Church has bestowed; or those who assume a priestly office and work which only belong to CHRIST Himself?" This is a very weighty and solemn question. may it be calmly pondered, in the divine presence; and may we seek grace to be faithful to Him who is not only our gracious Saviour but our sovereign Lord!

The remainder of our chapter presents a most solemn picture of divine judgment executed upon Korah and his company. The Lord very speedily settled the question raised by those rebellious men. The very record of it is appalling beyond expression. What must the fact have been? The earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the three principal movers in the rebellion; and the fire of the Lord went forth and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who undertook to offer incense.

"And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord" (Verses 28-30).

Moses, in these words, makes it a question simply between the Lord and the rebels. He can appeal to GOD, and leave all in His hands. This is the true secret of moral power. A man who has nothing of his own to seek - no aim or object but the divine glory - can confidently wait the issue of things. But in order to this, the eye must be single, the heart upright, the purpose pure. It will not do to assume or affect anything. If GOD is going to judge, He most assuredly will expose all assumption and affectation. These things can have no place when the earth is opening her mouth, and the fire of the Lord is devouring all around. It is all very well to swagger, and boast, and speak great swelling words, when all is at rest. But when GOD enters the scene, in terrible judgment, the aspect of things is speedily changed.

"And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also" (Verses 31-34).

Truly, **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** **"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about Him."** **"Our God is a consuming fire."** How much better it would have been for Korah had he rested content with his Levite service which was of the very highest order. His work as a Kohathite was to carry some of the most precious vessels of the sanctuary but he aimed at the priesthood, and fell into the pit.

Nor was this all. Hardly had the ground closed over the rebels, when **"there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense."**

It was a most terrific scene altogether - a signal and soul-subduing exhibition of divine judgment upon human pride and pretension. It is vain for man to exalt himself against GOD, for He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble, What consummate folly for worms of the dust to lift themselves up against the almighty GOD! Poor man! He is more silly by far than the

moth that rushes against the blaze that consumes it.

Oh! to walk humbly with our GOD! to be content with His will; to be satisfied to fill a very humble niche, and to do the most unpretending work! This is true dignity, and true happiness. If GOD gives as a crossing to sweep, let us sweep it, as under His eye, and to His praise. The grand and all-essential point is to be found doing the very work which he gives us to do, and occupying the very post to which He appoints us. Had Korah and his company learnt this, their piercing wail would never have terrified the hearts of their brethren. But, no; they would be something when they were nothing, and hence they went down into the pit.

Pride and destruction are inseparably linked together in the moral government of GOD. This principle always holds good, however the measure may vary. Let us remember it. Let us seek to rise from the study of Numbers 16. with a deepened sense of the value of an humble and contrite spirit. We live at a moment in the which man is pushing himself upward and onward. "Excelsior" is a very popular motto just now. Let us look well to our mode of interpreting and applying it. **"He that exalteth himself shall be abased."** If we are to be governed by the rule of GOD's kingdom, we shall find that the only way to get up is to go down. The One who now occupies the very highest place in Heaven is the One who voluntarily took the very lowest place on earth. See Philippians 2:5-11.

Here is our example, as Christians; and here, too, the divine antidote against the pride and restless ambition of the men of this world. Nothing is more sad than to witness a pushing, bustling, forward, self-confident spirit and style in those who profess to be followers of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. It is such a flagrant contradiction of the spirit and precepts of Christianity, and is a sure accompaniment of an unbroken condition of soul.

It is utterly impossible for any one to indulge in a boastful, pretentious, self-confident spirit, if ever he has really measured himself in the presence of GOD. To be much alone with GOD is the sovereign remedy for pride and self-complacency. May we know the reality of this in the secret of our own souls! May the good Lord keep us truly humble, in all our ways, simply leaning on Himself, and very very little in our own eyes!

The closing paragraph of our chapter illustrates, in a most striking manner, the incorrigible evil of the natural heart. One might fondly hope that after the impressive scenes enacted in the presence of the congregation, deep and permanent lessons would be learnt. Having seen the earth open her mouth - having heard the heart-rending cry of the rebels as they descended into the pit - having seen the fire of the Lord coming forth and consuming, as in a moment, two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation - having witnessed such tokens of the divine judgment - such a display of divine power and majesty - one might suppose that the people would henceforth walk softly and humbly; and that the accents of discontent and rebellion would no more be heard in their tents.

Alas! alas! man is not to be so taught. The flesh is utterly incurable. This truth is taught in every section and on every page of the volume of GOD. Illustrated in the closing lines of Numbers 16. **"On the morrow."** Think of that! It was not in a year, or a month, or even a week after the appalling scenes on which we have been dwelling, **"But, on the morrow, all the congregation** (no longer a few daring spirits merely) **murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying,**

Ye have killed the people of the Lord. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment" (Verses 41-45).

Here is another opportunity for Moses. The whole congregation is again threatened with immediate destruction. All seems hopeless. The divine long-suffering seems at an end, and the sword of judgment is about to fall on the whole assembly. But now it appears that in that very priesthood which the rebels had despised lies the only hope for the people; and that the very men whom they had charged with killing the Lord's people, were GOD's instruments in saving their lives.

"And Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague had begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And He stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed" (Verses 46-48).

It is here made very apparent that nothing but priesthood - even that very priesthood which had been so despised - could avail for a rebellious and stiff-necked people.

There is something unspeakably blessed in this closing paragraph. There stands Aaron, GOD's high priest, between the dead and the living, and from his censer a cloud of incense goes up before GOD - impressive type of One greater than Aaron, who having made a full and perfect atonement for the sins of His people, is ever before GOD in all the fragrance of His Person and work. Priesthood alone could bring the People through the wilderness. It was the rich and suited provision of divine grace. The people were indebted to intercession for their preservation from the just consequences of their rebellious murmurings.

Had they been dealt with merely on the ground of justice, all that could be said was, "**Let me alone that I may consume them in a moment.**"

This is the language of pure and inflexible justice. Immediate destruction is the work of justice. Full and final preservation is the glorious and vital characteristic work of divine Grace - grace reigning through righteousness. Had GOD dealt in mere justice with the people, His name would not have been declared, inasmuch as there is far more in His name than justice. There is love, mercy, goodness, Kindness, long-suffering, deep and unfailing compassion. But none of these things could be seen had the people been consumed in a moment, and hence the name of the Lord would not have been declared or glorified.

"For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off . . . For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another" (Isaiah 48:9, 11).

How well it a for us that GOD acts towards us, and for us for the glory of His own name!

How wonderful too that His glory should most fully shine - yea, could only be seen in that vast plan which His own heart has devised, in which He is revealed as "**a just God and a Saviour.**" Precious title for a poor lost sinner! In it is wrapped up all that such an one can possibly need for time and eternity. It meets him in the depth of his need, as a guilty hell-deserving one, bears him along through all the varied exigencies, trials, and sorrows of the wilderness; and, finally, conducts him to that bright and blessed world above, where sin and sorrow can never enter.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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