

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 12

The brief section of our book to which we now approach may be viewed in two distinct aspects:

- in the first place, it is typical or dispensational; and,
- in the second, moral or practical.

In the union of Moses with "**the Ethiopian woman**," we have a type of that great and marvellous mystery, the union of the Church with CHRIST her Head. This subject has come before us in our study of the Book of Exodus; but we see it here, in a peculiar light, as that which evokes the enmity of Aaron and Miriam. The sovereign actings of grace draw forth the opposition of those who stand upon the ground of natural relationship and fleshly privilege. We know, from the teaching of the New Testament, that the extension of grace to the Gentiles was that which ever elicited the fiercest and most terrible hatred of the Jews. They would not have it; they would not believe in it; nay, they would not even hear of it. There is a very remarkable allusion to this in the eleventh chapter of Romans, where the apostle, referring to the gentiles, says, "**For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: even so have these [Jews] also now not believed in your mercy [or in mercy to you] that they also may obtain mercy**" (Verses 30, 31; see Greek).

This is precisely what we have typically presented in the history of Moses.

He, first of all, presented himself to Israel, his brethren according to the flesh; but they, in

unbelief, rejected him. They thrust him from them, and would not have him. This became, in the sovereignty of GOD, the occasion of mercy to the stranger, for it was during the period of Moses' rejection by Israel that he formed the mystic and typical union with a Gentile bride. Against this union Miriam and Aaron speak, in the chapter before us; and their opposition brings down the judgment of GOD. Miriam becomes leprous - a poor defiled thing - a proper subject of mercy, which flows out to her through the intercession of the very one against whom she had spoken.

The type is complete and most striking. The Jews have not believed in the glorious truth of mercy to the Gentiles, and therefore wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. But they will be brought in, by and by, on the ground of simple mercy, just as the Gentiles have come in. This is very humiliating to those who sought to stand on the ground of promise and national privilege; but thus it is in the dispensational wisdom of GOD, the very thought of which draws forth from the inspired apostle that magnificent doxology, "**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of GOD! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.**"

Thus much as to the typical bearing of our chapter; Let us now look at it in its moral and practical bearing.

"And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth). And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord. will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous" (Verses 1-10).

It is a most serious thing for any one to speak against the Lord's servant. We may rest assured that GOD will deal with it, sooner or later.

In the case of Miriam, the divine judgment came down suddenly and solemnly. It was a grievous wrong, yea, it was positive rebellion, to speak against the one whom GOD had so markedly raised up and clothed with a divine commission; and who, moreover, in the very matter of which they complained, had acted in full consonance with the counsels of GOD, and furnished a type of that glorious mystery which was hidden in His eternal mind, even the union of CHRIST and the

Church.

But, in any case, it is a fatal mistake to speak against the very feeblest and humblest of GOD's servants. If the servant does wrong - if he is in error, if he has failed in anything - the Lord Himself will deal with him; but let the fellow servants beware how they attempt to take the matter into their hands, lest they be found like Miriam, meddling to their own hurt.

It is very awful to hear, at times, the way in which people allow themselves to speak and write about CHRIST's servants. True, these latter may give occasion; they may have made mistakes, and manifested a wrong spirit and temper; but we must confess we feel it to be a very dreadful sin against CHRIST to speak evil of His dear servants. Surely we ought to feel the weight and solemnity of these words, "**Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant?**"

May GOD give us grace to watch against this sore evil. Let us see to it that we be not found doing that which is so offensive to Him, even speaking against those who are dear to His heart. There is not a single one of GOD's people in whom we cannot find some good thing, provided only we look for it in the right way. Let us be occupied only with the good; let us dwell upon that, and seek to strengthen and develop it, in every possible way. And, on the other hand, if we have not been able to discover the good thing in our brother and fellow-servant; if our eye has only detected the crooked thing; if we have not succeeded in finding the vital spark amid the ashes - the precious gem among the surrounding rubbish; if we have only seen what was of mere nature, why then let us, with a loving and delicate hand, draw the curtain of silence around our brother, or speak of him only at the throne of grace.

So also when we happen to be in company with those who indulge in the wicked practice of speaking against the Lord's people, if we cannot succeed in changing the current of the conversation, let us rise and leave the place, thus bearing testimony against that which is so hateful to CHRIST. Let us never sit by and listen to a backbiter. We may rest assured he is doing the work of the devil, and inflicting positive injury upon three distinct parties, namely, Himself, his hearer, and the subject of his censorious remarks.

There is something perfectly beautiful in the way in which Moses carries himself, in the scene before us.

Truly he proved himself a meek man, not only in the matter of Eldad and Medad, But also in the more trying matter of Miriam and Aaron. As to the former, instead of being jealous of those who were called to share his dignity and responsibility, he rejoiced in their work, and prayed that all the Lord's people might taste the same holy privilege. And, as to the latter, instead of cherishing any feeling of resentment against his brother and sister, he was ready, at once, to take the place of intercession.

"And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. And Moses cried unto The Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Verses 11-13).

Here Moses breathes the spirit of His Master, and prays for those who had spoken so bitterly

against him. This was victory - the victory of a meek man - the victory of grace. A man who knows his right place in the presence of GOD is able to rise above all evil speaking. He is not troubled by it, save for those who practice it. He can afford to forgive it. He is not touchy, tenacious, or self-occupied. He knows that no one can put him lower than He deserves to be; and, hence, if any speak against him, he can meekly bow his head and pass on, leaving himself and his cause in the hands of Him who judgeth righteously, and who will assuredly reward every man according to his works.

This is true dignity. May we understand it somewhat better, and then we shall not be so ready to take fire if any one thinks proper to speak disparagingly of us or of our work; nay, more, we shall be able to lift up our hearts in earnest prayer for them, and thus draw down blessing on them and on our own souls.

The few closing lines of our chapter confirm the typical or dispensational view which we have ventured to suggest.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again. And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth and pitched in the wilderness of Paran" (Ver. 14-16).

We may regard Miriam, thus shut out of the camp, as a figure of the present condition of the nation of Israel, who, in consequence of their implacable opposition to the divine thought of mercy to the gentile, are set aside. But when the "**seven days**" have run their course, Israel shall be restored, on the ground of sovereign grace exercised toward them through the intercession of CHRIST.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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