

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 14

"And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night."

Need we wonder? What else could be expected from a people who had nothing before their eyes but mighty giants, lofty walls, and great cities? What but tears and sighs could emanate from a congregation who saw themselves as grasshoppers in the presence of such insuperable difficulties, and having no sense of the divine power that could carry them victoriously through all? The whole assembly was abandoned to the absolute dominion of infidelity. They were surrounded by the dark and chilling clouds of unbelief. GOD was shut out. There was not so much as a single ray of light to illumine the darkness with which they had surrounded themselves. They were occupied with themselves and their difficulties instead of with GOD and His resources. What else therefore could they do but lift up the voice of weeping and lamentation?

What a contrast between this and the opening of Exodus 15!

In the latter their eyes were only upon the Lord, and therefore they could sing the song of victory.

"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina."

Instead of this it was Israel that was afraid, and sorrow took hold upon them.

"Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them."

In short, it is the most complete reversing of the picture. The sorrow, the trembling, and the fear take hold upon Israel instead of their enemies. And why? Because the One who filled their vision in Exodus 15 is completely shut out in Numbers 14. This makes all the difference. In the one case, faith is in the ascendant; in the other, infidelity.

"By the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

Oh! how do these triumphal accents contrast with the infidel cries and lamentations of Numbers 14! Not a syllable about sons of Anak, lofty walls, and grasshoppers, in Exodus 15. No, no; it is all the Lord. It is His right hand, His mighty arm, His power, His inheritance, His habitation, His actings on behalf of His ransomed people. And then if the inhabitants of Canaan are referred to, they are only thought of as sorrowing, terror-stricken, trembling, and melting away.

But, on the other hand, when we come to Numbers 14 all is most sadly reversed. The sons of Anak rise into prominence. The towering walls, the giant cities with frowning bulwarks, fill the vision of the people, and we hear not a word about the Almighty Deliverer. There are the difficulties on the one side, and grasshoppers on the other; and one is constrained to cry out, "Can it be possible that the triumphal singers by the Red Sea have become the infidel weepers at Kadesh?"

Alas! it is so; and here we learn a deep and holy lesson. We must continually recur, as we pass along through these wilderness scenes, to those words which tell us that, **"All these things happened unto Israel for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come"** (I Corinthians 10:11).

Are not we, too, like Israel, prone to look at the difficulties which surround us, rather than at that blessed One who has undertaken to carry us right through them all, and bring us safely into His own everlasting kingdom? Why is it we are sometimes cast down? Why do we mourn? Wherefore are the accents of discontent and impatience heard in our midst, rather than the songs of praise and thanksgiving? Simply because we allow circumstances to shut out GOD, instead of having GOD as a perfect covering for our eyes and a perfect object for our hearts.

And, further, let us enquire, wherefore is it that we so sadly fail to make good our position as heavenly men? - to take possession of that which belongs to us as Christians! - to plant the foot upon that spiritual and heavenly inheritance which CHRIST has purchased for us, and on which He has entered as our forerunner? What answer must be given to these inquiries? Just one word -

Unbelief.

It is declared, concerning Israel, by the voice of inspiration, that, "**they could not enter in** [to Canaan] **because of unbelief**" (Hebrews 3).

So is it with us. We fail to enter upon our heavenly inheritance - fail to take possession, practically, of our true and proper portion - fail to walk, day by day, as a heavenly people, having no place, no name, no portion in the earth - having nothing to do with this world save to pass through it as pilgrims and strangers, treading in the footsteps of Him who has gone before, and taken His place in the heavens. And why do we fail? Because of unbelief. Faith is not in energy, and therefore the things which are seen have more power over our hearts than the things which are unseen. Oh! may the Holy Spirit strengthen our faith, and energize our souls, and lead us upward and onward, so that we may not merely be found talking of heavenly life, but living it to the praise of Him who has, in His infinite grace, called us thereto.

"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said Unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were. it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

There are two melancholy phases of unbelief exhibited in Israel's history in the wilderness; the one at Horeb, the other at Kadesh.

- at Horeb they made a calf, and said, "**These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.**"

- at Kadesh, they proposed to make a captain to lead them back into Egypt.

The former of these is the superstition of unbelief; the latter, the willful independence of unbelief; and, most surely, we need not marvel if these who thought that a calf had brought them out of Egypt should seek a captain to lead them back, The poor human mind is tossed like a ball from one to the other of those sore evils. There is no resource save that which faith finds in the living GOD. In Israel's case GOD was lost sight of. It was either a calf or a captain; either death in the wilderness, or return into Egypt. Caleb stands in bright contrast with all this. To him it was neither death in the wilderness, nor return into Egypt, but an abundant entrance into the promised land behind the impenetrable shield of the Lord.

"And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against, the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones."

And for what were they to be stoned? Was it for telling lies? was it for blasphemy or evil-doing?

No; it was for their bold and earnest testimony to the truth. They had been sent to spy the Land, and to fulfil a true report concerning it. This they did; and for this "**All the congregation bade stone them with stones.**"

The people did not like the truth then any more than now. Truth is never popular. There is no place for it in this world, or in the human heart. Lies will be received; and error in every shape; but truth never. Joshua and Caleb had to encounter, in their day, what all true witnesses, in every age, have experienced and all must expect, namely, the opposition and hatred of the mass of their fellows. There were six hundred thousand voices raised against two men who simply told the truth, and trusted in GOD. Thus it has been; thus it is; and thus it will be until that glorious moment when "**The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.**"

But oh! how important it is to be enabled, like Joshua and Caleb, to bear a full, clear, and uncompromising testimony to the truth of GOD! How important to maintain the truth as to the proper portion and inheritance of the saints! There is such a tendency to corrupt the truth - to fritter it away - to surrender it to lower the standard. Hence the urgent need of having the truth in divine power in the soul, of being able, in our little measure, to say, "**We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.**"

Caleb and Joshua had not only been in the land, but they had been with GOD about the land. They had looked at it all from faith's point of view. They knew the land was theirs, in the purpose of GOD; that it was worth having as the gift of GOD; and that they should yet possess it by the power of GOD. They were men full of faith, full of courage, full of power.

Blessed men! They were living in the light of the divine presence, while the whole congregation were wrapped in the dark shades of their own unbelief. What a contrast! This it is which ever marks the difference between even the people of GOD. You may constantly find persons of whom you can have no doubt as to their being children of GOD; but yet they never seem to rise to the height of divine revelation, as to their standing and portion as saints of GOD. They are always full of doubts and fears; always overcast with clouds; always at the dark side of things. They are looking at themselves, or at their circumstances, or at their difficulties. They are never bright and happy; never able to exhibit that joyful confidence and courage which become a Christian, and which bring glory to GOD.

Now all this is truly lamentable; it ought not to be; and we may rest assured there is some grave defect, something radically wrong. The Christian should always be peaceful and happy; always able to praise GOD, come what may. His joys do not flow from himself, or from the scene through which he is passing; they flow from the living GOD, and they are beyond the reach of every earthly influence. He can say, GOD, the spring of all my joys. This is the sweet privilege of the very feeblest child of GOD. But here is just where we so sadly fail and come short. We take our eyes off GOD, and fix them on ourselves, or on our circumstances, our grievances, or our difficulties; hence all is darkness and discontent, murmuring and complaining. This is not Christianity at all. It is unbelief - dark, deadly, God-dishonouring, heart-depressing unbelief. "**God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.**"

Such is the language of a true spiritual Caleb - language addressed to one whose heart was

feeling the pressure of the difficulties and dangers which surrounded Him. The Spirit of GOD fills the soul of the true believer with holy boldness. He gives moral elevation above the chilling and murky atmosphere around, and lifts the soul into the bright sunshine of that region where storms and tempests never rise.

"And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

What a moment was this in the history of Moses!

Here was what nature might well regard as a golden opportunity for him. Never before and never since have we any occasion in the which a mere man had such a door open before him. The enemy and his own heart might say, "Now's your time. You have here an offer of becoming the head and founder of a great and mighty nation - an offer made to you by the Lord Himself. You have not sought it. It is put before you by the living GOD, and it would be the very height of folly on your part to reject it."

But, reader, Moses was not a self-seeker.

He had drunk too deeply into the spirit of CHRIST to seek to be anything. He had no unholy ambition, no selfish aspirations. He desired only GOD's glory and His people's good; and in order to reach those ends, he was ready, through grace, to lay himself and his interests on the altar.

Hear his marvellous reply.

Instead of jumping at the offer contained in the words, **"I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they"** - instead of eagerly grasping at the golden opportunity of laying the foundation of his personal fame and fortune - he sets himself completely aside, and replies in accents of the most noble disinterestedness:

"And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people; that thou, Lord, art seen face to face; and that thy cloud standeth over them; and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (Verses 13-16).

Here Moses takes the very highest ground. He is wholly occupied about the Lord's glory. He cannot endure the thought that the luster of that glory should be tarnished in the view of the nations of the uncircumcised. What though he should become a head and a founder? what though future millions should look back to him as their illustrious progenitor? this personal glory and

greatness was only to be purchased by the sacrifice of a single ray of divine glory, - what then Away with it all. Let the name of Moses be blotted out for Ever. He had said as much in the days of the calf; and he was ready to repeat it in the days of the captain.

In the face of the superstition and independence of an unbelieving nation, the heart of Moses throbbed only for the glory of GOD. That must be guarded at all cost. Come what may - cost what it may, the glory of The Lord must be maintained. Moses felt it was impossible for anything to be right if the basis were not laid firmly down in the strict maintenance of the glory of the GOD of Israel. To think of himself made great at GOD's expense was perfectly insufferable to the heart of this blessed man of GOD. He could not endure that the name which he loved so well should be blasphemed among the nations, or that it should ever be said by any one, **"The Lord was not able."**

But there was another thing which lay near the disinterested heart of Moses.

He thought of the people. He loved and cared for them. The Lord's glory, no doubt, stood uppermost; but Israel's blessing stood next.

"And now," he adds, **"I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now"** (Verses 17-19).

This is uncommonly fine. The order, the tone, and the spirit of this entire appeal are most exquisite.

There is, first and chiefest of all, a jealous care for the Lord's glory. This must be fenced round about on every side. But then it is on this very ground, mainly, the maintenance of the divine glory, that pardon is sought for the people. The two things are linked together in the most blessed say, in this intercession. **"Let the power of my Lord be great."** To what end? Judgment and destruction? Nay; **"The Lord is long-suffering."** What a thought! The power of GOD in long-suffering and pardon! How unspeakably precious! How intimate was Moses with the very heart and mind of GOD when he could speak in such a strain! and how does he stand in contrast with Elijah, on Mount Horeb, when he made intercession against Israel!

We can have little question as to which of these two honoured men was most in harmony with the mind and spirit of CHRIST.

"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy."

These words were grateful to the ear of the Lord, who delights in dispensing pardon.

"And the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word." And then He adds, **"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."**

Let the reader carefully note these two statements. They are absolute and unqualified. **"I have pardoned;"** and, **"All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."** Nothing could, by any possibility, touch these grand facts. The pardon is secured; and the glory shall yet shine forth over all the earth. No power of earth or hell, men or devils, can ever interfere with the divine integrity of these two precious statements. Israel shall rejoice in the plenary pardon of their GOD; and all the earth shall yet bask in the bright sunshine of his glory.

But then there is such a thing as government, as well as grace. This must never be forgotten; nor must these things ever be confounded. The whole book of GOD illustrates the distinction between grace and government; and no part of it, perhaps, more forcibly than the section which now lies open before us.

Grace will pardon; and grace will fill the earth with the blessed beams of divine glory; but mark the appalling movement of the wheels of government as set forth in the following burning words:

"Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went; and his seed shall possess it (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley). To-morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea" (Verses 22-25).

This is most solemn. Instead of confiding in GOD, and going boldly on into the land of promise, in simple dependence upon His omnipotent arm, they provoked him by their unbelief, despised the pleasant land, and were compelled to turn back again into that great and terrible wilderness.

"The Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even Forty years; and ye shall know my breach of promise. I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me; in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die" (Verses 26-33).

Such, then, was the fruit of unbelief, and such the governmental dealings of GOD with a people

that had provoked Him by their murmurings and hardness of heart.

It is of the utmost importance to note here that it was unbelief that kept Israel out of Canaan, on the occasion now before us.

The inspired commentary in Hebrews 3 places this beyond all question. "**So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.**" It might, perhaps, be said that the time was not come for Israel's entrance upon the land of Canaan. The iniquity of the Amorites had not yet reached its culminating point. But this is not the reason why Israel refused to cross the Jordan. They knew nothing and thought nothing about the iniquity of the Amorites. Scripture is as plain as possible: "**They could not enter in**" - not because of the iniquity of the Amorites; not because the time was not come - but simply "**because of unbelief.**"

They ought to have entered. They were responsible to do so; and they were judged for not doing so. The way was open. The judgment of faith, as uttered by faithful Caleb, was clear and unhesitating: "**Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.**" They were as well able, at that moment, as they could ever be at any moment, inasmuch as the One who had given them the land was the spring of their ability to enter upon it and possess it.

It is well to see this; and to ponder it deeply. There is a certain style of speaking of the counsels, purposes, and decrees of GOD - of the enactments of His moral government; and of the times and seasons which he has put in His own power - which goes far to sweep away the very foundations of human responsibility. This must be carefully guarded against. We must ever bear in mind that man's responsibility rests on what is revealed, not on what is secret. Israel was responsible to go up at once and take possession of the land; and they were judged for not doing so. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness, because they had not faith to enter the land.

And does not this convey a solemn lesson to us? Most surely. How is it that we, as Christians, so fail in making good, practically, our heavenly portion? We are delivered from judgment by the Blood of the Lamb; we are delivered from this present world by the death of CHRIST; But we do not, in spirit and by faith, cross the Jordan, and take possession of our heavenly inheritance. It is generally believed that Jordan is a type of death, as the end of our natural life in this world. This, in one sense, is true. But how was it that when Israel did, at length cross the Jordan, they had to begin to fight? Assuredly, we shall not have any fighting when we actually get to Heaven. The spirits of those who have departed in the faith of CHRIST are not fighting in Heaven. They are not in conflict in any shape or form. They are at rest. They are waiting for the morning of the resurrection; but they wait in rest, not in conflict.

Hence, therefore, there is something more typified in Jordan than the end of an individual's life in this world. We must view it as the figure of the death of CHRIST, in one grand aspect; just as the Red Sea is a figure of it, in another; and the blood of the paschal lamb, in another. The blood of the lamb sheltered Israel from the judgment of GOD upon Egypt. The waters of the Red Sea delivered Israel from Egypt itself and all its power. But they had to cross the Jordan; they had to plant the sole of their foot upon the land of promise, and make good their place there in spite of every foe. They had to fight for every inch of Canaan.

And what is the meaning of this latter? Have we to fight for Heaven? When a Christian falls

asleep, and his Spirit goes to be with CHRIST in paradise, is there any question of fighting? Clearly not.

What then are we to learn from the crossing of Jordan, and the wars of Canaan? Simply this, JESUS has died. He has passed away out of this world. He has not only died for our sins, but He has broken every link which connected us with this world; so that we are dead to the world, as well as dead to sin, and dead to the law. We have, in GOD's sight, and in the judgment of faith, as little to do with this world as a man lying dead on the floor.

We are called to reckon ourselves dead to it all, and alive to GOD through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. We live in the power of the new life which we possess in union with CHRIST risen. We belong to Heaven; and it is in making good our position as heavenly men that we have to fight with wicked spirits in the heavenlies - in the very sphere which belongs to us, and from which they have not yet been expelled.

If we are satisfied to "**walk as men**" - to live as those who belong to this world - to stop short of Jordan, If we are satisfied to live as dwellers upon the earth, if we do not aim at our proper heavenly portion and position, then we shall not know anything of the conflict of Ephesians 6:12. It is seeking to live as heavenly men now on earth, that we shall enter into the meaning of that conflict which is the antitype of Israel's wars in Canaan.

We shall not have to fight when we get to Heaven, but if we want to live a heavenly life, on the earth, if we seek to carry ourselves as those who are dead to the world, and alive to Him who went down into Jordan's cold flood for us, then, assuredly, we must fight. Satan will leave no stone unturned to hinder our living in the power of our heavenly life; and hence the conflict. He will seek to make us walk as those who have an earthly standing, to be citizens of this world, to contend for our rights, to maintain our rank and dignity, to give the lie, practically, to that great foundation Christian truth, that we are dead and risen with and in CHRIST.

If the reader will turn for a moment to Ephesians 6, he will see how this interesting subject is presented by the inspired writer.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood (as Israel had to do in Canaan); but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Verses 10-13).

Here we have proper Christian conduct. It is not here a question of the lusts of the flesh, or the fascinations of the world, though surely we have to watch against these, but "**the wiles of the devil.**" Not his power, which is forever broken, but those subtle devices and snares by which he seeks to keep Christians from realizing their heavenly position and inheritance.

Now, it is in carrying on this conflict, that we so signally fail.

We do not aim at apprehending that for which we have been apprehended. Many of us are

satisfied with knowing that we are delivered from judgment by the Blood of the Lamb. We do not enter into the deep significance of the Red Sea and the river Jordan; we do not practically seize their spiritual import. We walk as men, the very thing for which the apostle blamed the Corinthians. We live and act as if we belonged to this world, whereas Scripture teaches and our baptism expresses that we are dead to the world, even as JESUS is dead to it; and that we are risen in Him, **"through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead"** (Colossians 2:12).

May the Holy Spirit lead our souls into the reality of these things. May He so present to us the precious fruits of that heavenly land which is ours in CHRIST, and so strengthen us with His own might in the inner man, that we may boldly cross the Jordan and plant the foot upon the spiritual Canaan. We live far below our privileges as Christians. We allow the things that are seen to rob us of the enjoyment of those things that are unseen. Oh! for a stronger faith, to take possession of all that GOD has freely given to us in CHRIST.

We must now proceed with our history.

"And the men which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the Land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still" (Verses 36-38).

It is wonderful to think that out of that vast assembly of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, there were only two that had faith in the living GOD. We do not of course, speak of Moses, but merely of the congregation. The whole assembly, with two very brilliant exceptions indeed, was governed by a spirit of unbelief. They could not trust GOD to bring them into the land; nay, they thought He had brought them into the wilderness to die there; and surely we may say, they reaped according to their dark unbelief. The ten false witnesses died by the plague; and the many thousands who received their false witness were compelled to turn back into the wilderness, there to wander up and down for forty years, and then die and be buried.

But Joshua and Caleb stood on the blessed ground of faith in the living GOD - that faith which fills the soul with the most joyful confidence and courage. And of them we may say, they reaped according to their faith.

GOD must always honour the faith which He has implanted in the soul. It is His own gift, and He cannot, we may say with reverence, but own it wherever it exists. Joshua and Caleb were enabled, in the simple power of faith, to withstand a tremendous tide of infidelity. They held fast their confidence in GOD in the face of every difficulty; and he signally honoured their faith in the end, for while the carcasses of their brethren were mouldering in the dust of the wilderness, their feet were treading the vine-clad hills and fertile valleys of the land of Canaan. The former declared that GOD had brought them forth to die in the wilderness; and they were taken at their word. The latter declared that GOD was able to bring them into the land, and they were taken at their word.

This is a most weighty principle, **"According to your faith be it unto you."** Let us remember

this, GOD delights in faith. He loves to be trusted, and He delights to put honour on those who trust Him.

On the contrary, unbelief is grievous to Him. It provokes and dishonours Him, and brings darkness and death over the soul. It is a most terrible sin to doubt the living GOD who cannot lie, and to harbour questions when He has spoken. The devil is the author of all doubtful questions. He delights in shaking the confidence of the soul, but he has no power whatever against a soul that simply confides in GOD. His fiery darts can never reach one who is hidden behind the shield of faith. And oh, how precious it is to live a life of childlike trust in GOD. It makes the heart so happy, and fills the mouth with praise and thanksgiving. It chases away every cloud and mist, and brightens our path with the blessed beams of our Fathers countenance. On the other hand, unbelief fills the heart with all manner of questions, throws us in upon ourselves, darkens our path and makes us truly miserable.

Caleb's heart was full with joyful confidence, while the hearts of his brethren were filled with bitter murmurings and complaints. Thus it must ever be, if we want to be happy, we must be occupied with GOD and His surroundings. If we want to be miserable, we have only to be occupied with self and its surroundings. Look, for a moment, at the first chapter of Luke. What was it that shut up Zacharias in dumb silence? It was unbelief. What was it that opened the hearts of Mary and Elizabeth? Faith. Here lay the difference. Zacharias might have joined those pious women in their songs of praise. Were it not that dark unbelief sealed his lips in melancholy silence. What a picture, What a lesson! Oh that we may learn to trust GOD more simply. May the doubtful mind be far from us. May it be ours, in the midst of an infidel scene, to be strong in faith giving glory to GOD.

The closing paragraph of our chapter teaches us another holy lesson - let us apply our hearts to it with all diligence.

"And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning, and gat them up to the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised: for we have sinned. And Moses said, wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? But it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites, and the Canaanites are there before you. And ye shall fall by the sword; because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top; nevertheless, the ark of the covenant of the Lord and Moses, departed not out of the camp. The Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah."

What a mass of contradictions is the human heart! When exhorted to go up, at once, in the energy of faith, and possess the land, they shrank back and refused to go. They fell down and wept when they ought to have conquered. In vain did the faithful Caleb assure them that the Lord would bring them in and plant them in the mountain of His inheritance - that He was able to do it. They would not go up, because they could not trust GOD. But now, instead of bowing their heads and accepting the governmental dealings of GOD, they would go up presumptuously, trusting in themselves.

But ah! how vain to move without the living GOD in their midst! Without Him, they could do nothing. And yet, when they might have had Him, they were afraid of the Amalekites; but now they presume to face those very people without Him.

"Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised."

This was more easily said than done. An Israelite without GOD was no match for an Amalekite; and it is very remarkable that, when Israel refused to act in the energy of faith, when they fell under the power of a God-dishonouring unbelief, Moses points out to them the very difficulties to which they themselves had referred. He tells them **"The Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you."**

This is full of instruction. They, by their unbelief, had shut out GOD; and therefore it was obviously a question between Israel and the Canaanites. Faith would have made it a question between GOD and the Canaanites. This was precisely the way in which Joshua and Caleb viewed the matter when they said, **"If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."**

Here lay the grand secret. The Lord's pleasure with His people secures victory over every foe. But if He be not with them, they are as water poured upon the ground. The ten unbelieving spies had declared themselves to be as grasshoppers in the presence of the giants; and Moses, taking them at their word, tells them, as it were, that grasshoppers are no match for giants. If on the one hand, it be true that **"according to your faith, so be it unto you;"** it is also true, on the other hand, that according to your unbelief, so be it unto you.

But the people presumed. They affected to be something when they were nothing. And, oh! how miserable to presume to move in our own strength! What defeat and confusion! what exposure and contempt! what humbling and smashing to pieces! It must be so. They abandoned GOD in their unbelief; and He abandoned them in their vain-presumption. They would not go with Him in faith; and He would not go with them in their unbelief. **"Nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp."** They went without GOD, and hence they fled before their enemies.

Thus it must ever be. It is of no possible use to affect strength, to put forth lofty pretensions, to presume to be anything. Assumption and affectation are worse than worthless. If GOD be not with us, we are as the vapour of the morning. But this must be learnt practically. We must be brought down to the very bottom of all that is in self, so as to prove its utter worthlessness. And truly it is the wilderness, with all its varied scenes, and its thousand and one exercises, that leads to this practical result. There we learn what flesh is. There nature comes fully out, in all its phases; sometimes full of cowardly unbelief; at other times, full of false confidence. At Kadesh, refusing to go up when told to go; at Hormah, persisting in going when told not. Thus it is that extremes meet in that evil nature which the writer and reader bear about, from day to day.

But there is one special lesson, beloved Christian reader, which we should seek to learn

thoroughly, ere we take our departure from Hormah; and it is this:

There is immense difficulty in walking humbly and patiently in the path which our own failure has rendered necessary for us.

Israel's unbelief, in refusing to go up into the land, rendered it needful, in the governmental dealings of GOD, that they should turn about and wander in the wilderness for forty years. To this they were unwilling to submit. They kicked against it. They could not bow their necks to the necessary yoke.

How often is this the case with us! We fail; we take some false step; we get into trying circumstances in consequence; and, then, instead of meekly bowing down under the hand of GOD, and seeking to walk with Him, in humbleness and brokenness of spirit, we grow restive and rebellious; we quarrel with the circumstances instead of judging ourselves; and we seek, in self-will, to escape from the circumstances, instead of accepting them as the just and necessary consequence of our own conduct.

Again, it may happen that through weakness or failure, of one kind or another, we refuse to enter a position or path of spiritual privilege, and thereby we are thrown back in our course, and put upon a lower form in the school. Then, instead of carrying ourselves humbly, and submitting, in meekness and contrition, to the hand of GOD, we presume to force ourselves into the position, and affect to enjoy the privilege, and put forth pretensions to power, and it all issues in the most humiliating defeat and confusion.

These things demand our most profound consideration. It is a great thing to cultivate a lowly spirit, a heart content with a place of weakness and contempt. God resisteth the proud, but He giveth grace to the lowly. A pretentious spirit must, sooner or later, be brought down; and all hollow assumption of power must be exposed. If there be not faith to take possession of the promised land, there is nothing for it but to tread the wilderness in meekness and lowliness.

And, blessed be GOD, we shall have Him with us in that wilderness journey, though we shall not and cannot have Him with us in our self-chosen path of pride and assumption.

The Lord refused to accompany Israel into the mountain of the Amorites; but He was ready to turn about, in patient grace, and accompany them through all their desert wanderings. If Israel would not enter Canaan with the Lord, He would go back into the wilderness with Israel. Nothing can exceed the grace that shines in this. Had they been dealt with according to their deserts, they might, at least, have been left to wander alone through the desert. But, blessed for ever be His great name, He does not deal with us after our sins, or reward us according to our iniquities. His thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor are.

His ways as our ways. Notwithstanding all the unbelief, the ingratitude, and the provocation exhibited by the people; notwithstanding that their return back into the desert was the fruit of their own conduct, yet did the Lord, in condescending grace and patient love, turn back with them to be their travelling companion for forty long and dreary years in the wilderness.

Thus, if the wilderness proves what man is, it also proves what GOD is; and, further, it proves what faith is; for Joshua and Caleb had to return with the whole congregation of their

unbelieving brethren, and remain for forty years out of their inheritance, though they themselves were quite prepared, through grace, to go up into the Land. This might seem a great hardship. Nature might judge it unreasonable that two men of faith should have to suffer on account of the unbelief of other people. But faith can afford to wait patiently, and besides, how could Joshua and Caleb complain of the protracted march, when they saw the Lord about to share it with them? Impossible. They were prepared to wait for GOD's time; for faith is never in a hurry. The faith of the servants might well be sustained by the grace of the Master.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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