

THE REPORT OF THE SPIES.

– *AUG. 4, NUM. 13:17-20,23-33.* –

Golden Text – "The Lord is with us; fear them not." – **Num. 14:9.**

STILL bearing in mind the typical character of Israel's experiences; that the consecrated Gospel Church is her antitype; and St. Paul's statement (1 Cor. 10:11) that these things are written for our admonition, let us consider the important lessons of the scrap of history before us. In reading the full account, included in Num. 13:14; Deut. 1:1,2,19-36, several thoughts are brought forcibly to our attention; viz., (1) That "without faith it is impossible to please God." (2) That the faith which God expects to find in us is a reasonable faith, having for its basis a good, solid foundation justifying its exercise. (3) That treason against God will not go unpunished. (4) That God hears and answers intercessory prayer on behalf of his people, except in the one case of treason. (5) That fidelity to the truth will in due time be gloriously rewarded, though for a long time the faithful may suffer to some extent on account of the unfaithful.

Let us consider the illustration of these principles. God gave to Israel abundant evidence of his love and power and of his special favor toward them above all the families of the earth. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm he brought them out of Egypt, across the Red sea, fed them with manna in the wilderness, caused the barren rock to bring forth refreshing waters, gave them his law amidst the inspiring scenes at Sinai and led them through the desert with the pillar of cloud and of fire, the emblems of his presence.

When they came to the borders of the promised land their faith was put to the test by the reports of the spies and their conflicting counsel as to the ability of Israel to go up as the Lord commanded and possess the land. Ten of the twelve discouraged the undertaking and

counselled disobedience to the divine command, while the other two, with Moses, reminding the people of the fact that the Lord in whom they had abundant reason to trust would go with them, counselled that they go up immediately and possess the land, and that, with the Lord on their side, they were abundantly able. The latter was the language of faith and obedience; the former of cowardice and rebellion.

To the evil counsel the people hearkened and became mutinous against Moses and the faithful spies, declared their purpose to return to Egypt, and were about to stone these faithful ones to death and choose from among themselves a leader to guide them back to the land from which God had delivered them. – Num. 14:1-4,10.

Just here God interfered on behalf of his servants, and declared his purpose against the disloyal hosts of Israel, saying to Moses, "I will smite them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." (14:12.) What a suggestion of personal honor and preferment was this to Moses – that his own posterity should inherit the blessing, instead of this rebellious host. And then it would relieve him at once of all the labor and care and weariness of leading, instructing and judging this people, and permit him to spend the remainder of his days in the tranquility of domestic life. Such a course, too, on the Lord's part would have been entirely consistent with his plan and perfectly just; yet for the time it would have been misunderstood by the world at large; for the attention of all the nations had been attracted to the wonderful power of Israel's God, and in such a case they would be ready to take up a reproach against him and say that his power had failed and that he was unable to fully accomplish the deliverance of his people.

But Moses was more mindful of the Lord's honor than of his own. "And Moses said unto the Lord, Then **[R1842 : page 170]** the Egyptians will hear it,...and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land; for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people....Now if thou shalt kill 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." How beautiful this self-forgetfulness in its zeal for God, this humility and patient endurance and the loving spirit that could so tenderly pray for the wayward and even mutinous hosts that conspired against his life! What a lesson is here for every one filling a responsible position in the body of Christ!

But mark how the faithful man of God frames his petition in harmony with God's law. He does not ask that the Lord might clear the guilty, persistently wilful sinners, contrary to his law, but that only so far as might be consistent with his just and holy law he would pardon the iniquity of his people as he had done in the past, and not utterly consume them in his just wrath. Hear him: "And now 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." – Num. 14:17-20.

Now mark the answer – "And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word" – according to the word of his own holy law, whose promise of mercy to the erring (though not to wilful, determined sinners) Moses had pleaded on behalf of Israel. This mercy could be extended to the young, but not to the adults who were inexcusable; and this was now the tenth time they had rebelled against the Lord, showing their hearts strongly set to do evil. In this they were a type of a class of wilful sinners in this still more favored Gospel age who, having been once enlightened, etc., nevertheless, afterward prove disloyal to God and come under condemnation to the second death.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron to say to 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;...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." – Num. 14:28-33;1-4.

Here was a type of the value of intercessory prayer on behalf of those who sin not unto death. (1 John 5:16.) Let us bear in mind this privilege and duty of intercessory prayer for all such, and for our encouragement let us remember God's dealings with his faithful ones of old. And let us beware of any thing approaching to disloyalty to God – of any disposition to rebel against him and return to Egypt, the world; and also of that lack of faith which indicates a serious lack of appreciation of all of God's favors and leading in the past and which therefore fails to trust him for the future.

Beloved, the Lord has led us in the past by a way we knew not. It has not always been an easy way, but it has always been a safe way, a profitable way though often a rough and thorny one. True, it has been a way of privation, a lonely, wilderness way, but it has been good for that discipline and training so necessary to fit us for the greater blessings of the Canaan beyond. And has not the glory of the divine presence and favor been sufficient to compensate for all the barrenness of the wilderness way? Ah, yes! we hear you say; and our hearts respond, Amen!

"Oh, what are all earth's gilded toys
Compared with heaven's eternal joys?
Or even to the feast now spread
For pilgrims through the desert led?
Oh, sweeter far the wilderness,
With all its bleak, wild barrenness,
Than all the city's pomp and pride
Without our heavenly Friend and Guide.
Its manna is a foretaste sweet
Of heavenly bounty all complete;
Its cloudy pillar, guiding light,

Are earnest of the future bright."

Let us keep the wilderness way and rejoice as we go. See *Poems and Hymns of Dawn*, p. 57.
