

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

– EXOD. 16:4-15. – JULY 6, 1902. –

FOLLOWING the International S.S. course which seems to lead us in a very diversified and profitable course of general Bible study, we return now to studies in the Old Testament; – taking up the thread where we left it, in the passing of Israel through the Red Sea into the wilderness. The new quarter's lessons consider God's dealings with Israel, and the instructions given them in the wilderness. These were evidently intended to prepare a nation for self-government, which for nearly two hundred years had been in bondage, almost slavery. The first of this series of wilderness lessons may be designated a lesson of trust; and as we note Israel's experiences and the Lord's guidance of their affairs, doubtless we will all find lessons that will be helpful to us who, as spiritual Israelites, are being led by the antitypical Moses out of Egypt, the world, through a wilderness of instruction and trial and testing, toward the heavenly Canaan.

Three routes led from Egypt toward Canaan, and the Lord chose for his people the most roundabout way of the three: he had in view from the first, their need of training. Their long bondage had made them servile and weak, lacking in self-reliance in the new way and fearful that their leader, in whom they trusted remarkably, might yet prove incompetent for their deliverance. What a resemblance to all this we find in the spiritual Israelites! when first leaving the world and its rudiments – although trusting in Christ, our fully accepted Leader, how apt we are to feel fearful of our ability, even under his guidance, to gain the promised glorious deliverance from sin and its slavery!

The first disappointment in the journey was when the supply of water which they were carrying became exhausted and they had reached the waters of Marah (bitter) and found them brackish and unfit to drink; their disappointment was intense and they murmured against

Moses. He in turn cried unto the Lord for help, and in response was shown a tree which being cast into the waters purified them. This was the first lesson of trust, and the Lord impressed it upon them as such. (Ex. 15:25,26.) This experience was followed by a joyful one when their journey brought them to Elim, to its many water-springs and its palm groves, where they rested. Similarly the spiritual Israelite is not long out of Egypt before he is permitted to have trying experiences; and seeking refreshment he perhaps finds bitter disappointments, corresponding to the waters of Marah. The first impulse of the beginner in this way will probably be in the nature of murmuring which, whether so intended or not, is a reflection upon the wisdom and guidance of our Leader. The lesson to be learned is perfect trust: to look to the Lord to turn our bitter disappointments into profitable lessons. As Moses purified the waters of Marah, so our still mightier Leader can make out bitter experiences sweet if we will but trust him. Then to us also comes a season of rest and refreshment, an Elim condition. The Lord does not permit us to have bitterness and trials continually, lest we should become thoroughly discouraged. He leads us sometimes by still waters, restoring our soul, refreshing and resting us in his grace, and these experiences rightly received and producing in us thankfulness and appreciation, tend to make us stronger for the further journey and lessons in the wilderness school of the present life.

But evidently the lessons at Marah and Elim were not sufficient for Israel; they had not yet learned to trust the Lord, nor, that murmuring was an improper course; and so we find them murmuring again that Moses had led them out into the wilderness, away from the flesh-pots and leeks and onions of Egypt, to perish of hunger in the wilderness. How much more appropriate it would have **[R3036 : page 200]** been had they said to themselves, The Lord through Moses is our leader, and we will trust in him. Let us pray unto the Lord our God that he will supply all our needs according to the abundance of his wisdom and grace and power. However, they were not sufficiently advanced to take such a reasonable position, and were, therefore, infantile of disposition, so merely gave a wail of despair and disappointment. But

the Lord was gracious and patient, and although he upbraided and instructed them respecting improprieties of their course, he, nevertheless, answered their wail as he would have answered their more appropriate petition for "things needful."

QUAILS AND MANNA.

It was necessary that the Israelites should learn the lesson of their complete dependence upon the Lord – the lesson of trust – hence the Lord did not [R3036 : page 201] prepare for them the bounties of manna and quails until they felt their need. Had these been given without their need being first felt, no doubt the Lord's bounty would have been considered as merely a part of his responsible duty; whereas, having learned of their need, they were the better prepared to appreciate the provision, and also to realize its miraculous source. So it is with the spiritual Israelites in respect to spiritual necessities, encouragements, food, sustenance: they are permitted to feel their needs, and to ask that they may receive spiritual nutriment freely.

That the lesson might be the more impressed, the Lord first explained to Moses what he was about to do, and that there was a lesson to the people in connection with it; subsequently Moses and Aaron laid the promise before the people – that the Lord would give them flesh to eat that very evening; and that beginning with the next morning God would provide them with bread from heaven. They properly took no credit for this to themselves, but on the contrary, appealed to the people that they did wrong in murmuring against them as their leaders, and assuring them that they were really murmuring against the Lord their real leader. Had Moses and his assistant Aaron, and not the Lord, been their leaders, they would have taken great risks indeed in coming out, even from bondage, into the wilderness; because however well-intentioned Moses might have been, he was incompetent to supply the necessities for so vast a multitude. Evidently the people believed when they left Egypt that the Lord was leading and that Moses was merely his representative, and the fact that they now murmured against Moses

and not against the Lord implied a lack of faith and a lack of trust, a disposition to fear that Moses was leading them on his own responsibility. Moses, on the other hand, meekly ignores his own relationship to the work, and loyally points them to the Lord as being the one who had led them thus far, and who was thoroughly competent to supply all their needs and to perform toward them all of his good promises. Spiritual Israelites are similarly to keep in mind the fact that they are not following human leaders; that the real Director of the course of spiritual Israel, the real Leader, is the Lord; and that men, at the very most, are his honored representatives. In cases of disappointment of expectations we are to remember that God was and is our real Leader, and are not to doubt, not to murmur, but to learn the lesson of trust, of confidence, and to cry unto the Lord for further deliverances.

Human nature is vividly illustrated in the cry of the Israelites against Moses; their plaint was "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, when we did eat bread to the full! for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." They forgot all about the bitter bondage of Egypt; the making of bricks without straw; the task masters; and how they had cried out to the Lord for deliverance; they remembered only some of the pleasant things – and we are not to expect, under all the circumstances narrated, that they had any superabundance in the matter of food. So now the discontented mind fails to see the leadings of God's providences, – leaves him out of its calculations, – forgets the exceeding great and precious promises set before us in the Scriptures, for the time thinks only of the things given up. How apt are all to remember the pleasures and gratifications of the sinful condition, and to forget its burdens and heartaches and disappointments!

All Israel, probably, was assembled, in its representatives, the chief men of all the tribes, and these matters were explained, and the lesson still further impressed, by the manifestation to them of the

brightness of the Lord's glory in a cloud. The lesson of trust was being impressed; they were to know the Lord as their Leader and that all the provisions for their necessities were from him, although they were announced to them by the Lord's servants. This lesson, too, is for us.

After these instructions had prepared them, the quails came and the manna. A strong wind from the sea brought quail in immense numbers, which, wearied with the journey, were unable to fly high and thus came within the reach of the Israelites, many of them falling from sheer exhaustion. This was no less a miracle than if natural means had not been used in connection with it; the lesson of trust which it taught was that God is abundantly able to control the natural means in fulfilment of his promises. Travelers in that region tell us that such occurrences are not uncommon; one of these says, "I have myself found the ground in Algeria, in the month of April, covered with quail for an extent of many acres, at daybreak, where the previous evening there had not been one."

The provision of the manna was a miracle of another kind: wholly aside from the natural order of things, so far as we may be able to discern. The manna fell early in the morning and could be gathered after the dew had disappeared; it was evidently deposited in or from the dew by some power of God working probably in harmony with the natural laws of chemistry, not yet thoroughly understood. The grains were small and white and required painstaking labor to gather; nor was it then ready for use, but required to be either boiled or baked to prepare it as food. (vs. 23). Everything connected with the manna indicates not only that it was a most stupendous miracle, but a continuous one – lasting from this time for forty years; until Israel had entered the land of Canaan and ate of the old corn of the land. Again, it was miraculous that a double portion fell on the sixth day of the week and none on the seventh; and that it would spoil if kept over any night except the one following the sixth day.

By these two miracles Israel was taught the great lesson of confidence in God, – that to him and him alone they were to look as their Leader. And so to spiritual Israel the Lord gives providential leadings, teaching them the same lesson of trust in himself. To us this applies not only in respect to earthly food, in supply of our physical necessities, [R3036 : page 202] but also to the heavenly food and the supply of all our spiritual necessities. It teaches the same lesson that is expressed in our Lord's prayer, our Golden Text; namely, "Give us this day our daily bread." The Lord's people are to recognize God's providences daily; to walk by faith, not by sight. We see but the one step before us, and that sometimes indistinctly in the light of the lamp of the divine Word; its more distinct utterances are in respect to the ultimate end of the Lord's leadings; – that he has accepted us, as his people, under the Mediator of the New Covenant; that he is leading us by him through present experiences, trials and testings, in order that we may be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; – that he will continue to lead us if we will continue to follow, and will ultimately bring all of his faithful into the promised land, the heavenly Canaan.

The Lord's supply of our earthly needs is perhaps best represented by the provision of the quails. He overrules natural affairs to provide us the things needful, sometimes more and sometimes less abundantly. And as the Israelites doubtless ate of the quails not only at the time of their gathering, but preserved some of them for future use, so we in respect to earthly things are to use the things of this world as not abusing them. We are to use them wisely, remembering that while they come to us in the ordinary course of life, they are, nevertheless, God's provision and to be used with frugality and judgment, to his praise. If the supply is abundant, we are to be thankful, and if it is deficient we are to trust. We are to learn the lesson of trust; and that after having done what we are able to do in the way of providing for our necessities, we can safely leave all else to him with whom we have to do, – our Father in Heaven.

The lesson from the manna seems more particularly to illustrate our spiritual supplies, which come wholly from above. The manna is called in the Scriptures "The corn of heaven," "the bread of the mighty" – "angels' food." (Psa. 78:24,25; I Cor. 10:3.) Our Lord interprets the manna as a symbol of himself, – the Truth – of which a man may eat and never die. Nevertheless, this bread, although given freely, demands labor on the part of those who would appropriate it and obtain from it spiritual sustenance; it must be gathered, and it must be prepared as food. We cannot expect to come to Christ and to receive in an instant and without effort on our own part all the gracious mercy, blessing and truth that is in him. The truth is God's gift, to be sure; but it is so given as to require the putting forth of energy on our part, which will demonstrate our need, our hunger, our appreciation of this "bread of life." Neither can we receive enough in one day or one month or one year to sustain us perpetually; we need to come to the Lord daily, and to receive from him through his Word and spirit the life-giving forces by which we may be sustained day by day in the trials of life, – and by which we may grow strong **[R3037 : page 202]** in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Lord, evermore give us this bread! – day by day, until, entering into the antitypical Canaan, the heavenly Kingdom, we shall have no further need of this daily supply, but be changed, perfected as new creatures in Christ Jesus in the First Resurrection!

=====