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JOURNEYING TOWARD CANAAN.

– *NUM. 10:11-13,29-36* – *AUGUST 17.* –

Golden Text: – "For thy name's sake lead me, and guide me."
– **Psa. 31:3.**

ISRAEL spent nearly a year in the vicinity of Mt. Sinai. It was about a year and fifty days after their departure from Egypt that, by the Lord's instruction, they broke camp to journey toward the promised land – Canaan. Doubtless, their first impressions respecting the matter were that the Lord, through Moses, would lead them directly into the Land of Promise, and no doubt they wondered at the delay. We can see, however, that a nation reduced almost to the condition of slavery, would need many lessons to prepare the people for the glorious heritage which the Lord had promised them. In previous studies we have seen how the Lord inculcated lessons of trust, duty, obedience, worship and temperance, and subsequent events will prove to us that even with all these instructions the people were not yet ready to trust and obey the Lord so as to be properly fit for their inheritance.

During the eleven months spent in the vicinity of Mt. Sinai, important arrangements were effected – all tending to a larger degree of organization, government and personal responsibility amongst the people. [R3060 : page 249] When ready to leave Mt. Sinai they had not only their tribal organizations, but were additionally grouped in companies of ten and these into fifties and these again into larger groups or commands, so that the entire host was well marshalled. Besides this, they had in each tribe a Judge or lawgiver for minor questions; weightier matters being brought to Moses and through him to the Lord. Moreover, the Lord put his spirit upon seventy of the elders of the people, of all the tribes, so that they prophesied or taught the people, each in his own department; while the tribe of Levi had been specially set apart to the divine service. The Tabernacle had been made with all its

appurtenances, and the regular order of worship had been established – typical, like the people, of the better things coming afterward.

If, as we see, it was appropriate that Israel according to the flesh should have training-lessons in trust, obedience, etc., we can readily understand that their antitype, spiritual Israel, has much need of instruction, much need to learn lessons along the same lines, – and still more particularly, if they would be prepared to enter into typical Canaan. We need to learn to trust the Lord implicitly after we leave Egypt, the world, and set forth on the way to our Canaan; we need to learn that he alone is able to deliver us from the spirit of the world which would still pursue us and bring us back into captivity; we need to learn to trust the Lord for the heavenly manna and to gather it day by day; we need to learn confidence in the Lord, not only in the presence of the leaders whom he raises up for us, but also in their absence, and not to set up for ourselves earthly idols to draw our hearts away in any measure from the Lord and his arrangements, and the great purpose for which we have started under his leadership; we need to learn the import of the Covenant which he has graciously made with us, sealed with the precious blood; – to be faithful to our share therein to the extent of our ability, and to trust the remainder to our great Mediator.

We need also to learn the Tabernacle lessons – how and under what conditions we may have fellowship with God – may enter into the court and still further into the Holy, and ultimately, as members of the High Priest's body, into the Most Holy. We need to learn order in respect to natural as well as spiritual things; and that while the liberties of the Lord's people are to be conserved and bondage to evil is to be avoided, that, nevertheless, in all of the Lord's arrangements there is order, as represented in the order established amongst the Israelites. We are to learn first of all to be subject to the Lord, and secondly, to every ordinance of God; we are to consider the truly consecrated people of God as a unit and are to seek to co-operate one with another, and to remember the Apostle's words, "Remember them which have the rule over you," (Heb. 13:7), and again, "Yea, all of you be subject one to

another." (1 Pet. 5:5.) All of these lessons are necessary to us, as similar lessons in type were necessary to typical Israel.

The cloud, representing the Lord, rested over the Tabernacle during the sojourn in the vicinity of Sinai; but in harmony with the instructions given through Moses, when the appointed time had come, the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle and went before the people and about one hundred and fifty miles distant, rested over another wilderness nearer Canaan. The people followed it in marching order and apparently at first with great enthusiasm, praising the Lord. Vs. 35 seems to refer to Psalm 68 which describes the journey; see also Psa. 132:8. But whatever were the joyful anticipations of the people, they found the wilderness of Paran into which the Lord led them the scene of great trial, for it was much more rugged than the wilderness of Sinai and much less adapted to the care of their flocks and herds. This brought to the people fresh trials of faith and courage and endurance and confidence in the Lord and appreciation of his promises.

So with spiritual Israelites: after the Lord has given us certain lessons and experiences, some of which come to us under quiet and restful conditions, the order of procedure may be changed, and the indication of the Lord's providences may lead to some breaking up of conditions which had been both favorable and unfavorable in some respects – leading into new circumstances and conditions. It is not for the true spiritual Israelite to murmur or complain or even to express a choice; but to look to the Lord [**R3061 : page 249**] for guidance. If he can discern the leadings of divine providence, even though it be in a wilderness condition more arid and undesirable than that in which he has previously been, he is to follow the Lord's leadings unquestioningly and with songs of faith and confidence. We are marching toward Canaan and know that other experiences are due us and must be undergone ere we can inherit the promises. The lesson for us is prompt and thorough obedience to the Lord's leadings without murmurings – with joyfulness; and this can only be expected on the part of those who

have learned the lessons previously given them, and above all the lesson of faith, – confidence in the Lord's power and goodness and faithfulness.

REBELLION AGAINST GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

It was while in Paran that the people began to murmur again – for the leeks and onions and garlic and fish, etc., of Egypt. As little children to a father, they lamented to Moses – even regretting that they had been led out of bondage. Moses appealed the matter to the Lord, and the latter granted the request in displeasure, telling Moses that he esteemed the people to be murmurers against himself; because he was the real Leader and Moses merely his servant. The people wanted more *meat*, expressing themselves as wearied of the manna, so God sent them quails. An immense flock of quails was blown by a providential storm from the south and east over the Elantic Gulf into their camp. A writer on Eastern subjects says: – "These quails cannot sustain themselves long on the wing, and after crossing the desert 30 or 40 miles they would scarcely be able to fly....When exhausted they would easily be taken as they flew at a height of about two cubits (3 or 4 feet) from the [R3061 : page 250] ground." The people got an abundance; but ate so greedily that a pestilence broke out among them, which cost the lives of many, so that they called that place Kibroth-Hattaavah – "Graves of Greediness." Thus the Lord permitted their discontent and spirit of rebellion to work out a severe penalty in a natural way.

Is it not sometimes after the same manner with the Spiritual Israelites? Do not some after being well fed on spiritual manna permit a selfish, craving spirit to interrupt their fellowship with the Lord to some extent – hankering for earthly, fleshly, good things; – forgetting the wisdom of our Leader, the Lord, and that his love which thus far has delivered us, and fed and led us, is still with us, as wise and as good as ever? Sometimes it is a repining against our lot in life, a desire for more ease and comfort and wealth and social influence, than are within our reach: sometimes it is a protest against our share of the aches and pains

of the groaning creation and our inability to get rid of these: sometimes it is a protest against the illness and death of a loved one.

How unwise! Should not those who have been fed on the spiritual manna realize that all of Spiritual Israel's affairs are under the Lord's care and supervision? Should they not remember that, – He doth not willingly afflict the children of men, but for their good? (Lam. 3:33; Heb. 12:10.) Ah! some have found that the prayers of murmurers, even when answered, as were Israel's, sometimes bring unexpected drawbacks; – that selfish prayers are too expensive. Some have gained wealth and lost the truth and its service: some have gained health only to find that with it they gained other trials no less severe: some have had their dear ones restored to them from the very jaws of death, only to wish afterward that God had not answered their prayers; – or, more correctly, to wish that they had accepted the Lord's wisdom and providences trustfully, contentedly, uncomplainingly.

The lesson to Israel was, that they should trust the Lord implicitly; and accepting and using all that they had, all that the surroundings would supply, they should have used it as wisely and as thoroughly as possible – accepting all things, natural as well as miraculous, as God's gifts. And therewith they should have been content, thankful, happy. So, too, Spiritual Israel should use wisely such things as are within their reach – accepting all as God's gifts with thanksgiving; but their petitions should be for spiritual gifts – including patient-endurance and heart-contentment.

REBELLION AGAINST THE DIVINE ORDER.

It was in Paran that Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses' leadership asserting themselves his equals in authority. Miriam, the prime mover in the matter, referred to Moses' marriage to a negress (Ethiopian) as an evidence of his general incapacity to manage his own affairs, much less those of a nation. The text of the complaint is given only in part, but undoubtedly the fact that they were now near to Canaan and well organized and that it was now comparatively easy to lead the

people, led to this wrong position. Both were quite willing that Moses should be leader when the start was made and when all the chances seemed to be against the success of the movement.

Poor Moses! If it almost crushed him when the people murmured against him, how must he have felt when his two most trusted advisers thus showed that they too had a wrong view of the Exodus, and considered Moses a self-appointed leader! True, it does appear to us as though his meekness had led him into a marriage in every way beneath his education and station in life; but then, was he not under divine supervision in all his affairs? And could not the Lord have hindered the marriage unless he saw some way in which it could prove advantageous? And should not Miriam and Aaron have remembered this, and minded their own business? As a matter of fact we believe that the Lord was favorable to the marriage; – that thus he forestalled any inclination on the part of Israel to accept the children of Moses as their kings and lawgivers to the subversion of the divine program.

The Lord's indignation was shown in smiting Miriam with leprosy and refusing to heal her for seven days even at the entreaty of Moses; – that thus the camp of Israel might also get a lesson in harmony with a subsequent statement, – "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

The lesson of trusting to the Lord's vigilance in minding his business and the lesson that each Israelite indeed should mind his own business, are still closely identified. Many, nay all, still need to learn these lessons. The officiousness which inclines so many to think that the Lord's work will go to wreck unless they control the lever and pass their judgment upon everybody and everything, is dangerous to all who have it, and their name is legion. It is born of too great self-conceit mixed with lack of respect for God's wisdom and with a desire to meddle as "busybodies in other men's matters." Each should early learn that while doing his own part with his might he should trust much to the Lord, and that to him each

"COME THOU WITH US AND WE WILL DO THE GOOD."

servant stands or falls. Failure to do this leads to leprosy – sin.

Hobab, here introduced to our attention (vs. 29), was Moses' brother-in-law. (Judg. 4:11 – R.V.) Raguel is here given as the name of Moses' father-in-law and is supposed to refer to the same person called Jethro in another place. The explanation offered is that Raguel was his proper name and Jethro, which signifies *Excellent*, was his title as a chieftain of the Midianites, of the clan known as Kenites which dwelt in Midian east of Sinai. Hobab, therefore, was also a chieftain amongst the Kenites and undoubtedly, as Moses' words suggest, was well acquainted with the country through which Israel would pass. Moses invited him to cast in his lot with the Israelites promising him that thus he, and such of his tribe as would come with him, should become joint-participators with the Israelites in the promises God had made them, – "Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning **[R3061 : page 251]** Israel...and it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do to us, the same will we do unto thee." Although Hobab at first refused, the promise of a share with Israel apparently influenced him favorably; because mention is made elsewhere of the Kenites as having share with Israel in the promised land. – Judges 1:16; 4:11; I Sam. 15:6; I Chron. 2:55.

Doubtless this narrative of divine arrangement with Hobab through Moses, was intended to convey a lesson to spiritual Israelites also. It represents that some who are not children of the promises according to the flesh, were, nevertheless, accepted of God because of the exercise of faith, – because of their willingness also to endure the trials and difficulties and warfare of the children of Israel, that they might be participators with them in the rewards and promises. So to-day, we may say to those who are still aliens, strangers, foreigners to the Lord's covenants, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good." We may tell whoever has an ear to hear of the gracious things which the Lord has

promised, of everlasting life in Paradise, to all who are his, – faithful to the end of the journey; and yet, it will be a matter for the exercise of their wills: if they share in the blessings, they must also be willing to share the difficulties of the way, and the reproaches of the Lord's people. Not only may we thus speak to people orally, inviting them to join with us, but our lives in general should be "living epistles," giving testimony of our faith in the Lord and in his promises; – helpful, encouraging and attractive to others.

Our Golden Text applies to every spiritual Israelite, and surely all such must recognize the leadership of the Lord, else they cannot have peace and joy and blessing, and cannot make progress toward our Canaan. The Israelites learned to look for the movement of the cloud by which the Lord led them, **[R3062 : page 251]** and only once is it recorded that they ever disobeyed its leading – and that once was accompanied by their reverse in battle before their enemies, which doubtless impressed the lesson. (Num. 14:44,45.) Similarly, one of the most important lessons for the spiritual Israelite is to learn to look to the Lord for leading in all of life's affairs – never to attempt any undertaking either temporal or spiritual without seeking to note the will of the Lord concerning the same.

The sooner this lesson is learned, the sooner disasters in life will be obviated; nevertheless, we are to remember that the Lord's providences may lead us into trying circumstances and conditions, and not always into pastures green. Yet in these, faith will be tested and developed and faithfulness to the Lord's leading will gradually bring us assurances that all things are working together for our good, for our spiritual welfare – the matters which appear to be favorable and comforting, and the experiences which seem to be rough and distressing. We are not to ask or expect the Lord's leading for our own sakes, nor for any merit or worthiness in us, but, as our Golden Text expresses it, for the Lord's sake – in accordance with his promise to us as spiritual Israelites, the seed of Abraham; – for his own name's sake and work's sake, in that he has purchased the blessing of the world, and

is now taking out a people for his name to be his agents in this work of blessing, – for his own name's sake in that he has invited us, promised us the victory if we abide in his love.

