

## **THE BLIGHT OF SIN AND ITS ONLY CURE.**

**"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." – John 3:14,15.**

ISRAEL'S experience in the wilderness prolonged thirty-eight years on account of their unreadiness, lack of faith to enter Canaan at first, was doubtless a season of valuable instruction in various ways; tho very little is told us respecting this period. Evidently those years of drilling in the laws, sacrifices, etc., brought the people to a comparatively moral and religious condition; so much so that their next prominent sin was in the nature of boasting of their holiness – pride of heart. Admitting degradation and sin and faithlessness in the past, they felt that they had made great progress and should no longer be dealt with as formerly. Admitting that it had been necessary for Moses and Aaron to rule them imperiously, they denied that this was any longer necessary; and under the leadership of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, quite a sedition developed; – the influence extending so far that it included two hundred and fifty leaders and most prominent men of Israel. Their contention was that all Israel was now holy (Num. 16:2,3); and that, therefore, Moses and Aaron should no longer be considered the only ones with whom God would communicate, – the intimation being that they were endeavoring to perpetuate a hierarchy which God had not established, and which true Israelities should not recognize.

There is a lesson here for spiritual Israelites: It teaches us not to become heady or highminded or boastful or proud of spiritual attainments and godliness. It teaches us that in God's estimation there is no holiness that does not include humility and full submission to the divine arrangement. It reminds us also of the prophesied rebellion that will take place in the close of the Millennial age, amongst those who will have reached perfection under the Millennial Kingdom, some of

whom will manifest their unfitness for eternal life by their lack of full submission to the divine arrangement.

Moses called to him the representatives of the insubordination; kindly and patiently he reasoned with Korah, the one who responded to his call, pointing out to him the Lord's arrangement; from the others he received but an insulting refusal to discuss the question. This kindness, forbearance and endeavor to help those whose feet were slipping out of the way, all the more commends the leader to our sympathy and appreciation, and teaches us to be gentle and patient with "those that oppose themselves" to the divine order. (2 Tim. 2:25.) But we are not to expect success in every instance, even as Moses had no success in this case; where the heart is wrong it cannot be guided by reason; and pride, boastfulness and ambition are evidences of a wrong condition of heart.

So far from endeavoring to use force against these men, Moses took them at their word and invited them to display the powers, privileges and divine authority which they claimed; and appointed that they should the next day meet with himself and Aaron and let the Lord by his providences decide matters. Korah's influence over the whole congregation was evidently very great; it is generally easier to influence people by telling them that they are better and greater than they had previously supposed – it works upon their pride. However, the Lord spared the people, tho he gave an illustration of his indignation against their assumptions, – by causing the earth to open and swallow up these three leading "holiness" rebels, their tents, families, etc., and by causing a plague to break out in the camp, in which the two hundred and fifty chief men who had joined in the conspiracy, died. One lesson here is that we should beware that our holiness is of the proper kind – not self-righteousness, but submission to the righteousness which is of God. Although these men did not die the Second Death, but will, in due time, share in the benefits of the great atonement accomplished by the antitypical Priest, nevertheless, they typified persons who enjoying great favors of the Lord

misappropriate these, applying them selfishly and in pride, will die the Second Death, and with them their allies, sharers in their sin.

One would suppose that so striking a manifestation of the divine will would thoroughly correct the wrong spirit amongst the people, and show them the difference between their boastful self-righteousness and the righteousness of full submission to the divine arrangement which alone could have the divine approval. But not so; human perverseness is shown in the fact that on the next day the leaders of Israel [R3100 : page 328] assailed Moses and Aaron with the charges that they were unholy men, murderers – that *they had killed* on the previous day, by some power of their own, some who were truly the Lord's people. As a consequence the Lord's indignation was enkindled against the people and they were spared, by the interposition of those whom they had traduced, only after 14,700 of their number had perished by pestilence. This same spirit of pride, rebellion, and its consequences may be noted in our day; how many there are who, because not right at heart, are in more or less sympathy with those with whom the Lord has no sympathy! They have seen "heady" ones rise up in the congregation of the Lord, seeking to draw away disciples after themselves, and afterward have seen these rejected of the Lord, instead of becoming great leaders as they expected; they have seen how, in the Lord's providence, the earth (worldliness or various false ideas) swallowed them up, buried them in oblivion so far as leadership was concerned; yet after witnessing the Lord's dealings with these, in putting them out of the light of present truth, etc., they are still sympathetic [R3101 : page 328] with them and complain that their fall into the darkness and oblivion was not of the Lord, but the fault of his "faithful." These resemble the Israelites who blamed the loss of these "renowned" would-be leaders upon the Lord's truly appointed servants, Moses and Aaron. Let us learn from this lesson to be always on the Lord's side, and to keep our hearts so free from prejudice, pride and self-will, that we may always be able to discern which is the Lord's side in every controversy. Those who do

not so, are likely to lose their spiritual life as the 14,700 in this type lost natural life.

After impressing the lesson of divine appointment, the Lord called for the rods of the chief men of every tribe – Aaron representing the tribe of Levi, and these rods were laid over night in the Most Holy; they were brought forth the next morning in the sight of all the people, and no change had taken place in any of them except the one belonging to Aaron, which was covered with buds, blossoms and almonds. Thus did the Lord emphasize his choice of the tribe of Levi and of the Aaronic priesthood, and impress the lesson of their recognition upon all Israel. So, too, the Lord has chosen Christ as the High Priest of our order, or profession, and the Church and household of faith, to be associated with him in the work of the ministry. These will ultimately be made known to all who desire harmony with the Lord; to all who will enter into the Millennial Canaan; – all the people will then know that God puts a wide difference between the "household of faith" and various teachers of morality, higher criticism, etc., who have denied the faith and who are attempting to teach upon other lines than those laid down in the Scriptures, of which the cross of Christ is the center. The light, the vitality and the fruits of righteousness are centered in the household of faith, and this will be made manifest to all.

Two other incidents of about this time – the close of the wilderness detention, – were the death of Miriam, Moses' sister, and the death of Aaron, his brother. The forty years being about completed, the people were ready now, under the Lord's direction, to enter Canaan. Kadesh Barnea had evidently remained the center of their encampment, and their Tabernacle had evidently continued there, tho of necessity so large a body of people with their flocks and herds must have roamed over quite an extensive area during those thirty-eight years, and of this we find various indications. (Num. 33:19-36.) The Canaanites probably feared an invasion and had to some extent fortified the country in the vicinity of Kadesh Barnea, the southern borders of Canaan, and perceiving now that the Israelites were

preparing to move, they made an attack upon them and took some prisoners; – probably by way of forewarning and intimidating them. This was the occasion for the vow mentioned in verse 2, that the cities of the Canaanites should be utterly destroyed when taken.

Verse 3 need not be understood to mean that Israel vanquished the Canaanites and destroyed their cities at this time; it is rather to be viewed as a parenthesis, an explanation that afterward, during the campaign of Israel in Palestine, God in harmony with their vow, did deliver to them the cities of the land, and that they did destroy them. They called the place Hormah as a remembrance of their vow. The right of such a total destruction of an enemy and his property would not be allowed in the civilized world to-day; we are to remember, however, that the Lord in these dealings with Israel was making types far reaching in their significations. In the type, the Canaanite and his citadels, etc., represented sin, its enticements, its blandishments and strong entrenchment in the weaknesses of the flesh. No compromise or truce with sin is to be made on the part of the new creature; it is to be a war of extermination; – and this was the signification of the type. It helps us to understand the matter much better, too, when we know that those Canaanites who were destroyed were not turned over by the Lord to devils for eternal torment; – but simply went down into the great prison-house of death, just the same as their fathers had done before them, only in a different form of death. It mattered nothing whether these died of pestilence or by the sword; – the time will come, anyway, when they shall all be brought forth from the prison-house of death by the great Redeemer, the antitypical seed of Abraham, to have an opportunity of coming to a full knowledge of the truth that they may be saved; – and that everlastingly, if they will, upon condition of their obedience and heart-conformity with the divine will.

Israel made a request of the Edomites (descendants of Esau, their father Jacob's brother) that they might pass through their country with a view to entering Canaan from its eastern side instead of from the southern. The Edomites refused the request, and thus compelled a long

and tedious journey around their territory through a very arid, barren country. It was here that the people so recently claiming to be "all holy" became so discouraged that they again wished that they were back in the land of Egypt and murmured [R3101 : page 329] against God and against Moses and against the manna upon which they were still being fed. It was at this juncture as a punishment for their impatience and their despising of the Lord's leading and provision for them, that the Lord sent them the plague of

### **THE FIERY SERPENTS**

Whether the Lord specially created these serpents or whether he merely took advantage of circumstances and conditions, as when he sent them the quail, we do not know, nor does it matter. In God's miracles he generally uses means to every end; these are to us miracles because we do not fully comprehend the means employed. As for instance, if we could imagine the knowledge of the *method* of telephoning, or the method of wireless telegraphy to be entirely blotted from the knowledge of man, the results, told in succeeding ages to people who knew not of the methods, would be miracles; we do not class them as such, because we understand the *modus operandi*. The fierceness of the attack of the serpents and the great mortality resulting amongst the Israelites might cause us to wonder; but we are to remember that it is estimated that in India, even at the present time "several thousand people annually die from the bite of the cobra." One writer describing the bite of a certain Brazilian serpent, says: "Even in those cases where the sufferer recovers, for a time the system is injured and the latent virulence of the poison can hardly be eliminated from the same even at the cost of festers, boils and ulcerations which last for many years. The nervous system is also very much affected as giddiness and paralysis are usually amongst the evidences of the strong venom which this reptile extracts by some inexplicable chemistry from perfectly harmless food."

The people had learned something through their experiences, and hence needed not to be told that this visitation of the fiery serpents was a chastisement from the Lord for their murmuring and rebellion. We are to learn in this connection to differentiate between such experiences on the part of the Israelites and similar experiences on the part of the world in general. We are to remember that by the Law Covenant which God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, he specially pledged their protection from disease and every adverse influence so long as they were faithful and loyal to him, and specially threatened that disloyalty and unfaithfulness would be punished by sickness, calamities, death, etc. – Lev. 26:3-46.

To the Israelite, therefore, sickness and pestilence meant divine wrath – to the other nations it meant the ordinary course of events; they were neither protected from the various death scourges of the world nor were these death-dealing scourges specially sent upon them.

The people came to Moses confessing their sin and asking his mediation with the Lord on their behalf; and, God-like, he did not stop to chide them when they were penitent and remorseful, but presented their case before the Lord most heartily. The Lord heard and answered the petition, but in a roundabout manner, well calculated to impress upon them their dependence upon him, – and to provide for us, spiritual Israelites, a great spiritual lesson. The remedy for the bites of the serpents was a look at a brazen (copper) serpent fastened to the top of a pole, said pole probably being carried about throughout the camp of Israel, that all the sick, suffering ones might have the opportunity of looking upon it and thus being healed.

We are not to question the meaning of this as a type, for our Lord himself in our Golden Text declares it. The serpent on the pole represented Christ on the cross. True, the serpent represents sin, vileness, evil, pain, suffering; while our Lord Jesus could be our Redeemer only because he was holy, harmless, separate from sinners. The question arises then, Why was the serpent used to represent our

Lord? Why was not Moses instructed to make a brazen dove, or a brazen lamb – as representative of the meekness and harmlessness and purity of him who died for us? We answer that a correct appreciation of the answer to this question is the key to an understanding of the great atonement provided by God for man, through the "Man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:5,6.) The serpent represented the atonement transaction better than any other emblem could. The serpent in Eden was Satan's agent and representative in the alluring of our first parents into sin: in this sense of the word the bite of that serpent, the devil, upon our race through our first parents, is destroying all the human family in death, – with the attendant pains and sufferings on account of which the Apostle declares, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." (Rom. 8:22.) It is impossible to get rid of the sin-virus of "that old serpent;" there is no **[R3102 : page 329]** remedy that we can apply: mankind can only look to God for help; and the help which God provides is through the sending of his Son, the undefiled One. Nor will it do that that undefiled One should visit us and know our troubles and sympathize with us, and counsel us how to get rid of sin. No, this is not sufficient, he may not contradict or undo the Father's decrees, tho he may fulfil them – he may take our place, he may bear our penalty. And thus the Apostle expresses it, "He who knew no sin was *made sin for us,*" that we might be made right in the sight of God through him. The serpent then represented sin, in every sense of the word; and as the whole world was serpented or inoculated our Lord must take the place of the sinner in order that the sinner might get free from the sentence; and this is why it was a serpent that was raised on the pole. "He was made sin for us" – treated as the one in whom centered the sin of the whole world.

As the bitten Israelite looked to the brazen serpent and was healed in response, so in the antitype we who are bitten by the serpent of sin, and who are writhing and dying under its virus must look away with the eye of our understanding (now the eye of faith), – we must look unto Jesus. We must see him as the serpent, as the one who took our



place, bore [R3102 : page 330] our sin-penalty, became our substitute, and thus bought us from under the sentence of death. It was not sufficient that the Israelite looked into the sky or looked at a lamb or looked at a bird overhead, it was necessary that he look at the brazen serpent. So with us, it will not do that man look at Jesus in various lights and shadows, some believing one thing and some another respecting him; for according to the divine arrangement only the one kind of faith in Christ is efficacious – and that is the faith which recognizes him as the ransomer, as our substitute, "Made sin for us." Men may get some blessing from looking at Jesus as a great, model man, a great Jew, a great teacher, etc.; they may find such a look profitable, morally, mentally, physically; but from such a view they cannot get eternal life, they will still perish from the bite of sin unless they do more than this; – only those who view him as the antitype of the serpent in the wilderness have his promise of forgiveness, and acceptance with God unto eternal life.

