

LED BY A WAY THAT THEY KNEW NOT

– *EXODUS 16:1-15.* – *JULY 7.* –

Golden Text: – "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." – John 6:51.

FULL of exultation at their great deliverance by the mighty hand of God, the Israelites, still guided by the cloudy pillar, journeyed for the promised land by a circuitous route. They started upon the journey, which lasted forty years, while it might have been accomplished in as many days. The object of the long delay was their instruction in righteousness, especially in faith. This would have been profitable for any people, but especially for a subject people born in a state of serfdom, and hence unused to liberty and initiative. But, more than this, natural Israel was intended of the Lord to constitute a type or shadow of spiritual Israel, and the lessons of the former were to be illustrative of the lessons of the latter. Whoever has read the story of Israel, and failed to discern that they and their experiences were foreshadowings of better things coming, has failed to get the gist of the lesson the Lord would teach. The experiences and instructions of the wilderness journey remind us of the poet's words, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform."

The first lesson of the journey showed that the people had much to learn along the lines of faith and trust in the Lord. One would have thought that the plagues upon Egypt resulting in their liberty would have been convincing proof to them of divine favor, and would have secured them from every doubt and fear that he who had begun a good work on their behalf would surely not desert them on the threshold. Nevertheless, after journeying for three days slowly they came to the waters of Marah, and sore was their disappointment when they found that they had been appropriately named – Marah, signifying bitter. The waters were

brackish and unpalatable and unfit for use. A great murmuring ascended from all sides, the disappointment was intense. Where was Moses? Why was the water brackish? The cry of the people to Moses was in unbelief, reproach; but Moses cried unto the Lord in faith, and the Lord showed him a tree which, cast into the waters, acted as a medicine, sweetening them, making them fit for use. The lesson to the people must have been a valuable one, leading them to trust the Lord more fully and to realize his continued care for their interests.

Water, one of the most important elements for human sustenance, is used in the Scriptures to represent the Truth – the message of God – the hope of everlasting life. In a certain sense the Law Covenant made with Israel was such a hope, such a fountain of water, of which the Israelites might drink and be refreshed and be enabled to gain eternal life. But while the Law was good in many respects, it had in it certain condemnatory qualities which hindered it from giving to the Israelites the refreshment and the life everlasting which they had hoped for. The Law made nothing perfect, writes the Apostle – yea, he adds, that which was thought to be unto life was found to be unto death. – Rom. 7:10.

HEALING THE BRACKISH WATERS

Moses, the Mediator of the Law Covenant, typified the Christ (Head and Body), the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the tree that Moses cast into the waters for their sweetening represented another tree – the one referred to in the statement, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13.) The tree represented the cross of Christ, the agency through which the waters of truth and divine law become waters of grace and blessing for the world of mankind in general when, in the Millennial Age, they shall be delivered from the bondage of Satan and sin, represented by the slavery of Egypt. As the Apostle points out, it will not be possible

for God to make a new law under which to bless mankind, for the Law given to Israel was good, was perfect, as the law of God must always be. The divine promises represented by the water were poisoned by sin – by Adam's disobedience – and hence were unsuitable and could not give the desired blessing. The cross of Christ, by cancelling Adamic sin, cancelled also the condemnation of the divine law against mankind, and eventually will permit the great antitypical Mediator to make the gracious promises of God good, refreshing, applicable to all who seek to walk in the ways of the Lord. The New Covenant between God and Israel, in which all the families of the earth are to share the benefit, will shortly be sealed with the precious blood – be confirmed, made operative. It merely waits for the completion of the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, and meantime the Church of the First-born are counted in as members of the Body of the Mediator, and permitted to suffer with him – to share with him in the sufferings of the present time, that they may also have a share in the glory that shall follow, when the New Covenant shall be sealed, and through it the blessing of the Lord extend to every creature. **[R4011 : page 184]**

"Traveling o'er the desert's scorching sand,
Father, lead me! grasp my hand.
Lead me on! Lead me on!
When at Marah, parched with heat,
And the sparkling fountain greet,
Make the bitter water sweet.
Lead me on! Lead me on!"

The New Creation is not under the Law but under grace – not under the Law Covenant nor under the New Covenant, but under the original Covenant, the "Everlasting Covenant," which reads, "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." As the Apostle assures us, it is the privilege of the Church of the First-born, who make their calling and election sure, to constitute

members of the "Seed," which under the New Covenant is to bless first natural Israel and subsequently all nations: "Ye, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise." (Gal. 4:28.) "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29.) The original Covenant, as the Apostle explains, was typified by Sarah: that Covenant was the mother of our Lord and of all his members. We have nothing to do with the Hagar Covenant, the Law Covenant, nor with the Keturah Covenant, the New Covenant, except that the promise is that in and through the elect Seed of the Sarah Covenant the offspring of both the other covenants, are to receive their blessings.

TWELVE FOUNTAINS AND SEVENTY PALMS

A journey of a few hours brought the Israelites to Elim, noted for its twelve fountains, or springs, and its seventy palm trees. It was a delightful resting place, symbolical of the blessings which may be enjoyed after our trials. The twelve springs, fountains, remind us of the apostles, God's special gift or blessing to the Church, through whom have come the refreshments of the water of life, and who are to be prominent also, according to the Lord's promise, in the Kingdom – in the work of blessing Israel and all the nations. The seventy palm trees remind us of the seventy whom our Lord commissioned subsequently to the twelve apostles, and whose ministries typified the public services of this Gospel Age down to its harvest or close. As the seventy were directed to go into every city whither our Lord would ultimately go, and were instructed, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come," it signified that our mission is to all nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues, wherever we may find a hearing ear, with the assurance that we shall not have more than accomplished the work of declaring the good tidings to every nation until the second coming of the Son of man in the power and great glory of his Kingdom.

Our lesson opens with the declaration that the Israelites removed from Elim, going toward Mount Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month – just thirty days from the time they left Egypt, following the Passover. Apparently, therefore, they stayed at Elim about two weeks before entering the wilderness region surrounding Mount Sinai, one of whose peaks was called Mount Horeb, where God manifested himself to Moses in the burning bush. Not only had Moses made this journey several times, but Aaron also, for we remember that after the Lord's first revelation at the burning bush he sent Aaron to Moses and they met in Horeb, the Mount of God. That meeting of Moses and Aaron prior to the passing over of the first-born, etc., might not improperly be understood to symbolize the beginning of this Gospel Age, and to be a picture of the two features of the work of Christ: Aaron representing the sacrificial work as the priest, and Moses representing the future work as the leader and commander of the people. The Church of the First-born was typically represented in the under-priests, the sons of Aaron, and also typically represented in the body of Moses, illustrating our participation in the sufferings of Christ in this present time and also our inheritance in him in the glory that shall follow.

The journeying of the people toward Mount Sinai, then, would represent the carrying out of the great program outlined at the beginning, when Moses and Aaron met by divine arrangement; the gathering of all the hosts of Israel to Mount Sinai typified not the blessings which came to the Church at Pentecost, but the blessings which are about to come to the world, all mankind who are ready and willing to receive them under the New Covenant. The covenant made with natural Israel at Sinai by Moses, the mediator of that Law Covenant, typified specifically the new and better Covenant about to be made with Israel, and incidentally with the whole world of mankind through the better Mediator, the Christ, Head and Body. The Apostle clearly sets this forth in his delineations in Hebrews 12, where he pictures the time of trouble

in the end of this age in connection with the sealing of the New Covenant with its type at Mount Sinai when and where the Law Covenant was sealed and made effective. His intimation is that in the trouble near at hand everything that can be shaken, political, social, religious, financial, will be shaken thoroughly, until only the unshakable, true things, shall remain. And these unshakable things he tells us will be related to the Kingdom of Messiah in which we shall share, "We receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken."

"THE BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN"

Travelers tell us that the wilderness surrounding Sinai is far from barren. One declares: "The whole sides of the valley through which the children of Israel marched are still tufted with brushwood, which doubtless afforded food for their beasts. Lastly, the herbage under these trees and shrubs is completely covered with snails of a prodigious size and of the best sort. However uninviting such a repast might appear to us, they are here esteemed a great delicacy. These mollusks of the land would aid in sustaining the people."

We can see, however, that so mighty a host would have a very limited bill of fare, and realizations of the conditions will help us to sympathize with them in their murmurings when they said, "Would to God we had died by the hands of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger." It appeared to them that their first hopes had died, that no preference of the Lord had been shown them, and that they should have continued under the Egyptian bondage. We see their lack of faith and that the lessons of the plagues and the sea and the healing of **[R4011 : page 185]** the waters of Marah had not given them full assurance of

faith that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was leading them forth to fulfil in them his glorious promises made to the fathers – the blessing of the world.

But while blaming them for lack of faith we are not to blame them for desiring some of the necessities of life, nor does the Lord blame them for the latter; rather he was waiting for them to appreciate their need, so that they might the better appreciate the bountiful provision which he had intended. In answer to their cry God sent them bread from heaven – not indeed baked, cut in slices and buttered, but according to the Lord's usual way he did for them what they could not do for themselves: he provided the substance from which they might make their bread. The distribution of the manna and its daily sending through a long period marks it as a miracle.

There are indeed other mannas from that desert of Arabia. One kind is exuded in drops from the tamarisk tree, and is a sweet, semi-fluid substance. The manna of commerce is an exudation from the flowering ash. But none of the known mannas of Arabia correspond to this described in Exodus: (1) The supply is very small and only at special seasons of the year; (2) they are unsuitable for food; (3) they can be kept indefinitely. The manna of the Israelites spoiled after twenty-four hours except that gathered on the sixth day, which corrupted not for forty-eight hours, leaving a rest from the gathering on the seventh day, the Sabbath. It was ground in mills, and baked as bread or stewed. By this miracle of the manna the Lord taught the Israelites faith in him as their great Provider.

To Spiritual Israelites there is a lesson in connection with the manna also: it is Scripturally called the "bread of angels," and again, the "bread of the mighty," and again, the "bread of heaven." (Psa. 78:25.) It was a food supplied by the Lord's providence. Our Lord Jesus tells us that he was the antitype of this bread – that it

typified the life-giving qualities which he possessed and which he sacrificed on our behalf; that all the dying race might profit through his death and obtain a right to life eternal. Thank God that some of us have had the eyes of our understanding opened to hear the message of good tidings respecting its value. More than [R4012 : page 185] this, some of us have already tasted that the Lord is gracious, and we have already fed on this bread from heaven, rejoicing the while that it is not only for the First-born but for all Israel – for all who eventually shall desire to come into accord with our God. It was some of this manna that by divine direction was put into the golden pot which was hidden in the ark with the scroll of the Law under the golden mercy seat, typifying, illustrating, the immortality which the Lord has provided for the Church of the First-born, to whom he has sent the message, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." (Rev. 2:17.) That incorruptible hidden manna in the golden pot represents the grace of God in the Church of the First-born, and teaches what is elsewhere plainly stated in the Scriptures, that the "little flock" shall enjoy the incorruptible life, immortality. While these will have inherent life, the remainder of God's creatures in their eternal perfection will instead of this have supplied to them eternal life.

"COME NEAR BEFORE THE LORD"

The lesson of faith was to be so impressed before the sending of the manna that its coming was foretold, and the Israelites were gathered to behold the glory of the Lord. They looked at the cloud which represented the Lord and which was caused to shine with resplendent glory. And as Aaron spoke to the congregation, telling them that their murmurings had been against the Lord and not against himself and Moses, and directing their attention to the cloud, behold, the glory, the brightness, of the Lord appeared in the cloud, and a message, saying, "I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them saying, At even shall ye

eat flesh and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God." How patient was the Lord in his dealings with his people – full of compassion and of tender mercy. The people should have cried unto the Lord, "Give us this day our daily bread," but should not have murmured and stipulated that they wanted something as good as the flesh-pots of Egypt.

Many Spiritual Israelites may learn a lesson along this line. It is not for us to dictate to the Lord how he shall provide for us, but by faith to accept his provision according to his promises, and while waiting for the same to make our requests, make them unto the Lord – but always according to his will. "Thy will be done" should be the spirit of our hearts, and hence the spirit of our prayers. Our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him, and he is more willing to give good gifts unto his children than are earthly parents to give good gifts to theirs.

"He that hath led will lead all through the wilderness;
He that hath fed will feed; he that hath blessed, will bless."

QUAIL ABOUT TWO CUBITS DEEP

Travelers tell us that in the spring of the year large flocks of quail frequently cross the Arabian Gulf of the Red Sea. They come in great flocks, and, wearied with their long flight across the water, they fly low, so as to be easily within the reach of man. Tristram 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 on the preceding afternoon there had been none." The reading of Numbers 11:7 seems to imply that on this occasion the quail were nearly two cubits deep, and infidels have pointed to the fact as an absurdity. It would be entirely possible, however, for us to understand the narrative to signify that the great quantities of quail flew low, even within two cubits of the ground, thus insuring

a large catch on the part of the flesh-hungry Israelites. The subsequent narrative indicates that the quail were not sent regularly, but only on rare occasions – so far as appears only here in the wilderness of Sinai and in the wilderness of Paran. – Numbers 11:31-34.

The next morning after the shower of quail the Israelites had a new experience with the "corn from heaven." It came with the dew, and when the latter left the little grains of food were scattered all over the country side. Thenceforth it became a part of the regular labor of each family to gather its portion of the heavenly manna. The word manna [R4012 : page 186] is supposed to signify, What is it? Moses answered, "It is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat." What a constant reminder they would have, in the necessity for gathering this grain, grinding it, making bread of it, etc., of the Lord's providential care for their interests. How full of faith and loyalty to him they should have subsequently become – more and more as the days went by. We are, therefore, continually astonished to find evidences of lack of faith and a disposition to contamination with idolatry, etc. If all this seems strange to us we should allow it to make a deep impression upon our minds and apply it to ourselves. For have not we the true Bread that came down from heaven? and has not God so arranged our affairs and interests that it is quite necessary for us to go continually to the throne of the heavenly grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need? Nevertheless, is it not true that many find their hearts overcharged with the cares of this life, and that their faith in the Lord continually needs to be refreshed? How few there are who go regularly to the throne of grace to obtain their supply of daily refreshment! How few who belong to the New Creation realize that the New Creature needs daily bread as much as does the natural man.

The supply of manna was a beautiful figure of the supply of grace in Christ: it needed to be gathered daily; it would not keep

over for succeeding days. The lesson of this would seem to be that those who accumulate much of God's grace and truth must also be dispensers of it. It is not provided with a view to the creation of a spiritual aristocracy. How often we have seen this exemplified: those who study the Word merely for themselves, and who do not commingle with the brethren and share their blessings, are not in the long run as much advantaged as we would have expected. Our gathering of the manna is to be day by day: our feeding on the heavenly bread is to be a continuous privilege, without which we will not have the strength for the journey of life; but with it we would be strong in the Lord, and may perchance be permitted to assist others by the dispensing of divine grace to them.

When our Lord declared himself to be the Bread from heaven, many of his hearers failed to comprehend the simile, and said, "This is a hard saying. Will this man give us of his flesh to eat?" They failed to see that our Lord personified the Truth, the great plan of God which centered in him, the life which he had come to give on behalf of the world, that we might live through him. To eat the flesh of Jesus literally would have merely produced flesh, but to eat of him in the sense of partaking of the blessings and mercies of God provided in him, and in the sense of appropriating his Spirit and disposition, is the proper thought. As we partake of our Lord's qualities they become ours, as we feed upon him in our hearts we become strong in faith and in all the graces of his Spirit. Let us then daily gather our portion of manna and daily seek to use it all, and realize that it will be our portion until we reach the heavenly Canaan. Surely then all the supply of divine grace experienced by the Lord's faithful should be stimulating to our faith and confidence in him who has called us from darkness into his marvelous light.
