

[R4037 : page 233]

GUIDED IN A LONG JOURNEY

- NUMBERS 10:11-13,29-36. - AUGUST 25. -

Golden Text: – "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light." – Exodus 13:21.

THE Israelites spent nearly a year at Mount Sinai before they were ready to begin the march for the land of promise. During that period quite a constructive work was accomplished amongst them, which transformed them from a horde of comparatively unorganized emigrants into a powerful nation, with covenant relationship to God. At Mount Sinai the Law Covenant was instituted, by which the nation was accepted of the Lord as his special people, distinguished from the other nations of the earth, they pledging themselves to full loyalty to the Lord and all the principles of his righteousness, and he pledging himself to them as their God, their guide, their protector. All of this arrangement, however, was centered in Moses, the mediator of that Law Covenant; he was the people's representative before the Lord and the Lord's representative before the people.

Their organization now was a combination of political and military arrangement under judges and officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. (Ex. 18:25; Deut. 1:15.) Besides this they had a general council of seventy – supposedly the original Sanhedrin. – Exodus 24:1; Num. 11:16. [R4037 : page 234]

During this stay at Sinai the priesthood was organized, also the Tabernacle constructed and its religious services instituted, with the outlines of the feasts and fasts appointed of the Lord for perpetual observance throughout their generations. That certainly was a year of great advancement with them as a people – a year of great accomplishments in making them ready for the land.

The wilderness of Sinai possessed rich though small valleys, and while there the people and their flocks and herds evidently prospered. The census according to Numbers 1:2 showed their enumeration to be 603,550 men of twenty years old and upward, besides 22,273 Levites. This would imply a total number of about 2,000,000.

When the time came to journey the Lord intimated it by causing the cloud to rise from the Tabernacle. It preceded the people, indicating the way in which they should go and guiding them into the desert of Paran, referred to in Deut. 1:19 as "a great and terrible wilderness." It must have seemed great to the people after traversing it hither and thither in the wanderings of their forty years. Amongst its terrors were the fiery serpents and the insufficient supply of water for so great a host. Remembering that the Israelites were only natural men, we cannot wonder at their murmurings against Moses and thus against the Lord in respect to many of their experiences. From our knowledge of humanity today we would be inclined to say that the murmuring disposition must be much greater now than it was then, for it is our opinion that no such host could be led for such a time under such conditions without the interposition of divine power. To have avoided murmuring and to have taken patiently all the wilderness difficulties would imply on the part of that people a faith greater than the natural man manifests anywhere today.

The fact that they were led by the Lord Jehovah – that the pillar of glory guided their journeyings by day and the pillar of fire marked and enlightened their camp by night – would indeed be a continual reminder to them of the Lord their God, of his covenant with them and of their covenant with him. The daily portions of manna would remind them also of his watchful care of their interests. The smitten rock and the waters therefrom, refreshing them in the journey, would indeed speak of the power of God enlisted on their behalf, and afresh mark Moses as the

divine representative and appointed leader in the right way. All this, however, would hardly account to them for the fact that the route chosen was far from the most direct one, and that the judgments visited upon them for their murmurings, etc., were severer by far than were those experienced by other nations round about them who worshiped idols and practised all manner of sin and contumacy.

"SET FORTH FOR AN EXAMPLE"

The only explanation of the whole matter and one which the Israelites could not themselves understand, because the time for its manifestation had not yet come, is the one given in the New Testament; – that the Israelites were used of the Lord as a typical people, whose testings for good and for evil were made to picture forth in advance the corresponding experiences of Spiritual Israel. As the Apostle points out, their rock and its water typified Christ and the water of life flowing from him. Their manna, our Lord indicated, typified the Bread which came down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall live forever. The fiery serpents which harassed them and guided the eyes of the suffering to the brazen serpent raised upon a pole, symbolized sin and its injurious effects, which cause the sin-bitten to look unto him who was made a curse for us in that he hanged upon a tree. The murmuring of Aaron and Miriam against Moses was made the occasion of divine displeasure, typifying God's indignation against those who fail to recognize him as the leader of Spiritual Israel, and who fail to honor those whom he uses as his mouthpieces and servants.

"The gainsaying of Korah" and his associates, claiming that they were just as well qualified as were Moses and Aaron to represent the Lord and his people in all religious functions, was punished severely, because of representing in the antitype those who would fail to recognize divine institutions in Spiritual Israel. The perishing of some for despising Moses' Law was intended to

be a type or picture of the everlasting destruction of those who would despise the antitypical Moses and the redemptive work accomplished through him, and who consequently shall be destroyed in the Second Death. Their Mount Sinai represented as a type the Kingdom of God. The giving of the Law therefrom represented the promulgation of the divine Law at the institution of the New Covenant at the hands of the antitypical Mediator, the Christ of glory, in the end of this age. The quaking earth and lightning flash and trumpet voice connected with that inauguration of the Law Covenant typified, says the Apostle, the great time of trouble and complete shaking of everything with which the new dispensation, the Millennium, will be ushered in shortly.

"MUCH ADVANTAGE EVERYWAY"

The Apostle, after pointing out that the Law Covenant to Israel made nothing perfect for them, brought in no glorious kingdom and rewarded with no eternal life, but rather condemned them all, shut them up to the hope that should afterward come to them through the Gospel, tells us nevertheless that the Jews had "much advantage everyway – chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." (Rom. 3:2.) What does he mean? What advantage did they have? We reply that all of their difficulties in the wilderness and subsequently were profitable to them as a nation, and individually profitable also to those who were rightly exercised by the tests and thereby drawn near the Lord.

Those experiences brought Israel at the time of our Lord's first advent into the first rank amongst the nations as respects holiness, godliness, righteousness; and Jews scattered all over the world at that time had a large influence in shaping whatever was good and noble amongst the most civilized, preparing the world in general for the Gospel message in its due season. We have the

evidence of this in the fact that the earlier converts to Christianity were nearly all from the Jews and from those Gentiles who had previously had contact with the Jewish religion and more or less faith in the true God. Not only so, but the trying experiences to which those people were subjected developed in some of them grand qualities of heart and of mind, as is witnessed in King David and all the prophets, as well as in many of the less notable ones, the faith of some of whom is attested by the Apostle. – Hebrews 11.

Some may be inclined to say, How could those blessings, [R4038 : page 235] coming to a few of the Israelites and to some of these centuries after, compensate them for their experiences, as, for instance, those who perished by the bite of the fiery serpents, and Korah and his band, whom the earth swallowed up, and others who died summarily for their violation of Moses' Law? Were not these irretrievable injuries, whatever the blessings of their trials to others of their people at the time, or to us the antitypical Israelites now? We answer, No! they were not irretrievable injuries. Like all the remainder of Adam's race they were under sentence of death because of original sin, and it mattered little whether they died in war or from pestilence or from serpent bites or by the earth opening beneath them, swallowing them up. They still have a share in the great blessing which God has provided through Jesus and through Spiritual Israel, whose difficulties and trials and testings they were illustrating as types. "Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man," and this redemption included those we have enumerated. The time is coming when all the families of the earth shall be blessed through the Redeemer, and this will include those whose cases we are considering. The Master declares that the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth, either with the Ancient Worthies of the Jewish epoch or with the overcomers of this Gospel Age to the resurrection of the blessed and holy, or otherwise to the general resurrection of all

those who have thus far failed to please God and to be accounted worthy of eternal life.

The latter class will include the great majority of humanity, and their awakening will be with a view to giving them a most favorable opportunity to learn of God's grace in Christ, to accept of the same, and to gain eternal life in the Paradise of God. We see then that no injustice was done to the Jews, though the Lord treated them in some respects more severely than the heathen nations. Though they suffered under divine judgments, no loss or injury was done to any of them, as all will yet have a full opportunity of coming to a knowledge of the truth and to eternal life through the Redeemer and his Spiritual Israel. We see also that in an educational way the experiences given to that people lifted them out of the degradation in which they had been almost slaves to a foremost rank in the world. We can agree with the Apostle that Israel had much advantage every way, being accepted of the Lord and used of him as types and shadows in connection with the preparation for his Spiritual Israel, the true Seed of Abraham, through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL STILL MORE BLESSED

If it was blessed to be associated with the Lord as members of the house of servants under Moses, how much more blessed is it to be now associated with the Lord as members of the still higher house of sons under Christ! If the performance of the types and shadows was honorable and brought blessings, how much greater must be the favors and blessings and honors attaching to those who serve the antitypical altar, the antitypical temple, as members of the Royal Priesthood, the Body of Christ! It is when we begin to see something of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine plan, and the glory that will surely attach to the ministers of divine grace when the reign of sin and death shall be ended, when the time of sacrificing shall be over and when the

time of glory and blessing shall be ushered in – that we appreciate the situation, and be, Oh, so thankful, for the privileges we have as Spiritual Israelites, as members of the Royal Priesthood, in attesting our loyalty to the Lord and his Word and his people, that we might be accounted worthy of a share with him and with our Redeemer in the glory, honor and immortality of the Kingdom.

HOBAB, THE SON OF RAGUEL

We have previously seen that Moses spent forty years near the Sinai wilderness in the family of his father-in-law, Jethro Raguel (Jethro is supposed to have been the title and Raguel the proper name). This lesson introduces Hobab, supposedly Moses' brother-in-law, who belonged to what is known as the Kenites, an Arab tribe of Midian, east of Sinai. Hobab had been with the people of Israel, but now upon their start on the journey for Canaan he contemplated returning to his own people, and our lesson sets forth two arguments on the part of Moses to influence him to remain. He said: –

(1) "We are journeying into the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

What words of faith, and how humble a statement from the leader of 2,000,000 of people. We note the utter absence of reference to himself and what he would do, or of his authority and power. Only the Lord's power and the Lord's blessing were either invoked or mentioned. Very properly we may regard this as a suggestion for ourselves in connection with our journeying toward the heavenly Canaan. Those who are with us, friends or neighbors or kindred, should be invited along these lines – lines of faith: "Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Whoever comes with us receives a blessing, and in urging any to come with us we receive a blessing because our own faith is encouraged, stimulated, and our own

obedience also to the Lord; for shall we say to others, The Lord will do thee good, and not experience good ourselves and not realize the blessings we are receiving day by day from the Lord's hand? And if they do come with us how the fact that we have suggested the matter and promised them a blessing would help to keep us from murmuring and complaining, and from manifesting anything else than the good we are continually receiving from the Lord. We do well, then, as Spiritual Israelites, to follow Moses' example in our appeals to those who are under our influence – we do well to quote to them the promises of the Lord, and to show our faith in the same.

But these arguments failed to influence Hobab, just as similar arguments on our part have failed to influence our friends. But, like Moses, we should not be ready to give up our endeavors to do good to others. We should bring forth other arguments, as he did. He urged Hobab further: –

(2) "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be if thou goest with us, yea, it shall be that what good soever the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." **[R4038 : page 236]**

Applying this argument to our friends it would seem to imply that we should help to make a place for them in connection with the Lord's service, again assuring them of a share in the reward. This argument did appeal to Hobab, and he went with the Israelites, and we have records of the Kenites amongst the Israelites for centuries, down to the time of Saul. (Judges 1:16; 4:11; 1 Sam. 15:6.) The intimation that he could be of service to the Israelites attracted him from his own country and people. Similarly some may be attracted to the Lord's people by opportunity for rendering service. It should be remembered, however, that there are varieties of service, and that the Kenites

were never invited to minister as priests at the altar. And so the Lord's people should not feel it to be appropriate that they should elect to places of prominence in the Church those who have not fully and completely made a consecration to the Lord; neither should they repel them, but rather be willing to use each and all to the extent of their willingness to serve and cooperate in the Lord's work.

Hobab, more familiar with this trackless wilderness than Moses and the Israelites, could give them many suggestions that would be helpful respecting water courses, pasturage, wells, etc. And here we see the appropriateness of all the Lord's people following a similar course to that of Moses. Notwithstanding his appreciation of the Lord as a leader of the hosts of Israel and the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, notwithstanding that he gave all honor for blessings past and those expected in the future to the Giver of every good, nevertheless he was ready to make use of every human instrumentality that would aid in the carrying out of the divine program. He did not expect of the Lord miracles in respect to matters that would properly come under human judgment and foresight. And so it is with us in all of the affairs of our earthly and spiritual interests: in all our ways we should acknowledge the Lord as the author and finisher of our course; but we should also, while seeking the wisdom from above for ourselves and for the work, do everything within our power, use every human agency and means in cooperation with the Lord and his mighty power. His proposition is that we may do all things through his strength – that he **[R4039 : page 236]** will use and bless our humble efforts for the carrying out of his great purposes. Some of the Lord's people seem to lack a proper judgment along these lines – some of them are even disposed to criticise as lacking in faith those who, like Moses, seek to use human instrumentalities in cooperation with the divine service and guidance.

Our lesson informs us that every morning in their services, when in obedience to the movement of the cloud they started forward in their journey, there was a simple religious service, Moses proclaiming in the ears of the leaders and through them in the ears of the people, –

"Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered,
And let them that hate thee flee before thee."

In the evening, when the camp settled from the journey of the day, again Moses' voice rang out in the words, –

"Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel." –
"Abide with us."

What was thus done every day by the Lord's direction in Natural Israel surely takes place with equal regularity in Spiritual Israel. All who will be found faithful, all Israelites indeed, as they go forth every morning to the journey of life, to the battle of life, to the trials and testings by the way, must surely learn to look unto the Lord as the Captain of their salvation, as the one through whom alone Satan and his hosts can be defeated, through whom alone we can have the victory. "Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; let them that hate thee flee before thee," and let us who love thee and abide in thy love and under thy protecting care, be safe-guarded from every experience that would do us real harm, and be "kept by the power of God through faith."

Which Spiritual Israelite can afford to retire at the close of the day without retrospectively calling to mind the goodness of the Lord and desiring his continued favor and protection in the shades of night? Which true Israelite will long be an Israelite indeed if he fail to acknowledge the Lord in all his ways, in his downyings and his uprisings? As the Apostle says, whether we eat or whether we drink or whatsoever we do all should be done to his glory, and if in all our ways we will acknowledge him let us

at the close of each day employ language somewhat similar to that of Moses and say to the Lord, Abide, O Lord, with all the thousands of thy true Israel everywhere. Keep us, guard us, according to thy wisdom and thy love in Christ Jesus!

The spirit of faith and reverence which runs all through the divine Word attests most grandly to the characters of those whom the Lord has used prominently in his service in the past, and gives even to the babes in Christ a confidence and assurance lacking in words from other sources not inspired nor infused by the Spirit of the Lord. As a grand example of these Biblical benedictions note that of the high priest, wherewith he was accustomed to bless the people, saying, –

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee,
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee!
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee
And give thee peace."
