

THE MANNA FROM HEAVEN

– *AUGUST 24.* – *EXODUS 16:2-15.* –

"Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life."
– John 6:35.

REALIZING their deliverance from bondage, and the Divine Power exercised in their behalf in the overthrow of the Egyptian army, the Israelites were joyful. Moses, their great leader, composed a poem of much force and beauty and of recognized high standard. The men chanted it after Moses; and the women, under the leadership of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, took timbrels, or tambourines, and joined in a refrain, or chorus, their bodies swaying and their feet moving rhythmically in what is described as a dance:

"Sing ye to the LORD [Jehovah];
For He hath triumphed gloriously."

Singing songs of praise constitutes one of the most interesting and most profitable methods of worship. But we may be sure that they are acceptable to God only as they come from the heart and truly represent its sentiments. We fear, alas, that many hymns, like many prayers, never go higher than the heads of the offerers; indeed, we have sometimes feared that careless, irreverent singing might really be resented by the Lord as profanity – taking His holy name in vain. If so, the results would be of course the very reverse of a blessing, and that in proportion as the singer comprehended the impiety of his course. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain."

We do not mean by this that any unjust or cruel torments, future or present, would be the penalty, but we do believe that such a course reacts upon the irreverent heart to make it colder, more indifferent,

and less susceptible to the influence of the Divine Message of grace. Ah! if all Christians sang with the spirit and with the understanding also, and if none others sang hymns, the earthly sounds might be more discordant than they are; but their Heavenly echoes and fragrance would be the more acceptable to God.

BITTER WATERS, THEN AN OASIS

The journey toward the Land of Promise began. At length, fatigued and thirsty, they came to a fertile spot, where there was an abundance of water, but alas, it was bitter, or brackish! The disappointment was great. The song of reverence was forgotten; the mighty power of Jehovah in bringing them through the Red Sea was forgotten; even the taskmasters of Egypt were forgotten. The people murmured against Moses for bringing them away from the fertile fields of Egypt and its abundance of good water. They declared that it would have been better if they had remained in Egypt, or even if they had died there. They declared that Moses and Aaron had misled them into leaving the land of plenty, and had brought them into the wilderness, to die there of hunger and thirst.

The Lord's Wisdom guided Moses to a certain kind of tree, which, put into the water, made it sweet and palatable. Moses explained to the people that in murmuring against him they were really murmuring against God, for he was merely God's agent in the matter. A further journey for a season, and they were far from the bitter waters – at Elim, a delightful spot, where they rested and were refreshed.

The Scriptures explain that God had a special purpose and object in this leading of Natural Israel. He was teaching them lessons which would be helpful to them and, if rightly received, would prepare them, through faith and obedience, for Canaan. "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, to prove thee, to know

what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments, or no." – Deut. 8:2.

The lesson to Spiritual Israel is a still more important one. If the Natural Israelites needed heart development and faith as a preparation for the earthly Canaan, how much more do Spiritual Israelites require for the Heavenly Canaan, toward which they journey from the time they leave Egypt – the world, and its bondage to sin! Can we wonder, then, that God permits many trying experiences to come to Spiritual Israel – trials of faith and of patience, "bitter waters"?

Any saint of God may have tears in the trying experiences of the journey in the narrow way, but none is excusable for murmuring. Rather, each should say with the Master, "The cup which My Father hath poured for me, shall I not drink it?" To those who approach the springs of bitterness with the proper faith in God as did Moses, the Lord makes known precious promises, which

"Steal the Bitter from Life's Woes."

As the Israelites were led from the bitter waters to Elim and its rest and shade, so God's Spiritual Israel are not tempted and tried above what they are able to bear. With every temptation the Lord provides a way of escape, when frequently He revives the souls of His saints **[R5279 : page 218]** by granting them seasons of refreshing and comfort, preparing them for their trials in the wilderness state of the present life. – I Corinthians 10:11-13.

"IT IS WHAT?" – IT IS MANNA

When the Israelites murmured against God and Moses, His mouthpiece and servant, it was because of insufficient faith. Those who truly believed in the Divine providences which had preserved them from the plagues of Egypt, and which had brought them out across the Red Sea, would reason assuredly that God would not

leave them to starve in the wilderness. But the majority evidently were murmuring through a lack of faith.

And so it is today. As St. Paul declares, "All men have not faith." We do not blame them for this. Evidently conditions of environment or heredity have very much to do with our possibilities along the line of faith. Some by birth, early training and larger experiences have therefore a great advantage over others, so far as the present Age is concerned; for God has ordained that the Message of the present time shall be for those who have the ear of faith. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." Whoever has an ear for God's Message and can exercise faith has a great blessing, in the sense of an opportunity which others do not have – an opportunity of making his calling and election sure under the call of this Gospel Age.

We thank God that His Word teaches of an Age to come, wherein Messiah will bless with precious opportunities those who have not the ear to hear and a responsive heart in the present time. We thank God that His Word expressly declares that in that coming Age, the Millennial Age, all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears shall be unstopped. Then will be fulfilled the Scripture that Jesus is the true Light which must eventually lighten every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:9.) But the opportunities of the Millennial Age will not make possible so high a blessing as the High Calling of this Age sets before whoever has the ears to hear and the eyes to see it.

In answer to the murmuring of the Israelites, God sent them that same night a great quantity of quail. If they had hungered for the flesh pots of Egypt, they should see that God was able to give them flesh in the wilderness. One of the accounts of this wonderful supply of quail has been found fault with by some agnostics who thought that it meant that the quails covered the entire ground to a depth of nearly five feet. The explanation is that quail, flying across the Gulf of Suez, in their weariness flew close to the ground – within about

five feet – and thus were easily captured by the Israelites in great numbers.

God promised that on the following day the Israelites should have plenty of bread. In the morning the ground was covered with small particles, whitish in appearance, a little larger than mustard seed and tasting like a honey wafer. This was to be their daily supply. It required gathering; and this gave them all employment, without which they would not have been happy. It required preparation. There was a certain amount apportioned to each individual.

A lesson of generosity went with the manna; for whatever portion was kept over to the following day corrupted. Nothing of the kind was known to the Israelites; and they asked, "What is it?" and this became its name – "What is it" – or "that manna." The gathering of it helped them to remember the Sabbath also, for none fell on the Sabbath, but a double portion on the day preceding, and what was kept over that night did not corrupt.

THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Jesus reminded His followers of that manna given in the wilderness, and declared that it typified Himself, the true Bread. As the Israelites would have perished without food, so the Spiritual Israelites would not have sufficient strength for the journey without the Heavenly food. Jesus gave Himself the title of the Truth. Whoever therefore eats of this Bread from Heaven partakes of the Truth. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth." Only by partaking largely, regularly, daily, of our Lord, His merit and His gracious arrangements for us, can we become strong in Him, and prosecute the journey faithfully and enter into the spiritual Canaan.

As every Israelite was required to gather manna for himself, so each Christian is required to gather and appropriate the Truth. We must do our own part along spiritual lines, as well as along earthly

lines. The graces of the Holy Spirit cannot be expected to come to perfection without preparatory planting, pruning, cultivating. Some one has well said, "Rooming at a college does not make a scholar, nor occupying a pew in church make a Christian." To grow strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, we must feed upon Him daily – we must appreciate and appropriate the merits of His sacrifice.

