

A GOOD MAN'S SIN

– *OCTOBER 26.* – *NUMBERS 20:1-13.* –

**"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart,
be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my
Redeemer." – Psalm 19:14.**

ISRAEL'S fortieth year after leaving Egypt was God's appointed time for them to enter the land of Canaan. Moses was in his one hundred and twentieth year, but yet quite vigorous. His sister Miriam had died previously; Aaron, his elder brother, still lived, but died the same year. For thirty-eight years the Children of Israel had resided in the wilderness, making Kadesh-Barnea their camp center, but really occupying a considerable portion of the wilderness with their flocks and herds.

It was in April of the fortieth year that, by Divine command through Moses, they assembled at Kadesh, prepared to enter into the Land of Promise. But the water supply was scant. The people and their cattle were famishing. Murmurings arose, and inquiries if it were not as well to have perished in Egypt or elsewhere as to perish there from thirst.

The burden naturally fell upon Moses, shared, however, by his brother Aaron. All leaders of honor and influence carry weighty responsibilities. Moses and Aaron in turn went to the Lord with the matter, not complainingly, but inquiringly – desiring guidance from on High – from the real Leader of Israel. Nor did they go in vain. The Lord graciously manifested Himself – "The glory of the Lord appeared unto them" – quite possibly also manifest to the people of Israel, who looked on. This glory is surmised to have been a ray of light emanating from the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy.

They were to take the rod, presumably "Aaron's rod that budded," and that was kept in the Ark in the Most Holy. That rod would be a reminder to the people of the Lord's special acceptance of Aaron as the High priest and assistant of Moses. It would be a sign to them of the Divine favor which hitherto had guided their nation, and which still would continue to guide all who would trust in the Lord and in the power of His might.

SMITING THE ROCK A SIN

The Lord particularly directed that Moses should speak to the rock, and that in response to the word waters would rush forth. On a previous occasion, about thirty-eight years before, in a similar experience near Mt. Sinai, Moses had been instructed to smite the rock; but in this case the rock was not to be smitten. Here Moses and Aaron sinned. "The meekest man in all the earth" forgot himself, and allowed a spirit somewhat akin to pride, self-sufficiency and anger to control him for the moment. Smiting the rock, he cried aloud to the people, "Ye rebels, must I bring you water out of the rock?"

The water indeed came forth, as the Lord had promised. The people indeed got the blessing needed, but one of the most illustrious men and servants of God there fell under Divine disapprobation. The Lord's decree was that neither Moses nor his brother should enter Canaan. Moses, however, was permitted to go with the people to the end of their journey, and then from Mt. Nebo to see the land across the Jordan.

This condemnation does not signify the Divine reprobation to eternal torment or to any lasting dishonor. Moses got his entire punishment then and there, before death, as do all of God's saintly ones. Whatever stripes, chastisements, punishments, of the future shall be meted out to mankind in general because of wrong doings in the present life, there are none reserved for the saints. The

Apostle explains that they are chastened in the present life, that they may not come into condemnation with the world by and by.

THEY DRANK OF THE ROCK – CHRIST

St. Paul points out to us that the smiting of the rock was symbolical. As the manna, the bread from heaven, represented Jesus, so the smitten rock represented Him also. The refreshing water from the rock symbolized the blessings which flow from Christ's sacrifice. The smiting of the rock at the beginning of Israel's experience was authorized of God. It was necessary that upon Jesus should fall the rod of affliction, even unto death:

(1) "The Lord laid upon Him [the death penalty for] the iniquity of us all";

(2) "By His stripes we are healed." – Isaiah 53:5,6.

St. Paul's words are, "They did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." – I Corinthians 10:4.

Just what was symbolized by the second smiting, which God did not authorize, is not explained by St. Paul. The fact that this second smiting was punished tells us that it was wrong, and that it symbolized some improper course on the part of the professed people of God. Two suggestions come to us, either or both of which may be applicable.

(1) This second smiting, at the end of the forty years and just as the people were about to be led into the Promised Land, may symbolize a smiting of the people of God – the Body of Christ which is the Church. A number of Scriptures appertaining to the Gospel Age give the inference that some of the saintly members of the Body of Christ in the end of this Age will be put to shame, or, perhaps, put to death – and thus enter into glory, as did the Master,

when He was smitten. In His case the high priest declared that it was expedient that one should suffer, rather than that the entire Jewish people should perish as a nation. – John 11:50.

The religious rulers conspired against the Master – as they supposed, for God's glory. The suggestion has been offered that similarly, in the end of this Gospel Age, religious leaders, moved by similar motives of self-preservation, may conspire for the smiting, the injury, of some of the Lord's followers. If this be a proper interpretation of the type, it indicates that under the Divine providence blessings will flow from the wrong course, yet no greater blessing than might have come by pursuing the right course – of speaking to the rock, asking for the water, the Truth, the refreshment, instead of smiting it.

(2) The other thought, closely related to this one, is that any denial of the Redeemer on the part of His consecrated followers would signify a crucifying afresh, a putting to open shame, a smiting of the rock the second time. St. Paul explains that such a repudiation of the Word of Christ by those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the Heavenly gift and of the powers of the world to come, etc., would mean for them an unworthiness of any place in the Heavenly Kingdom – that they would die the Second Death. – Hebrews 6:4-7.

The fact that both Moses and Aaron participated in the type, and that neither entered the land of Canaan, signifies that the very highest dignitaries and most enlightened members of the Royal Priesthood might be in danger of committing the sin typified, or pictured, in the second and unauthorized smiting of the rock. On the **[R5315 : page 284]** contrary, those who smote the antitypical Rock the first time – those who crucified Christ – the Scriptures assure us did so ignorantly and merely fulfilled the Divine intention. "I wot, brethren, that in ignorance ye did it, as did also

your rulers"; "for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." – Acts 3:17; I Corinthians 2:8.

LESSONS FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

If "the meekest man in all the earth," after long years of training and experience, made such a failure, even typically, the lesson to all spiritual leaders should be an impressive one. It says to us in inspired words, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The Lord declares (v. 12) that the sin of Moses and Aaron was one of unbelief, "because ye believed Me not – to sanctify Me in the eyes of Israel."

It *did* require faith in God for Moses to smite the rock. Apparently his lack of faith was in the people. Apparently he wished to produce a dramatic effect – to impress upon them a lasting lesson, "Ye rebels, must I bring you water out of the rock by a blow from this rod?" The effect may have been dramatic. The people may have stood in awe of Moses, but all the same, that was not the best way for dealing with the matter; for it was not God's way. Better would it have been for Moses to have hidden himself – humbled himself – and to have asked water from the rock in Jehovah's name.

Class leaders, Elders, ministers in the Church of Christ, will do well to remember that the blessings which God has arranged shall flow to His people from the smitten Jesus and will come for the asking; and that they are not authorized either to smite the "rock" or to pose dramatically before the people of God as necessary to the supply of the streams of grace and Truth.

On the other hand, the Lord's people, Spiritual Israel, thirsting for grace and Truth now due, are to feel a great deal of sympathy for those who occupy teaching positions. There never was a time surely when the honesty and the faithfulness of the Lord's servants were more severely tested than now. What all need is meekness,

patience, longsuffering, brotherly-kindness, love – loyalty to God – faithfulness to their Covenant.

EDOMITES, MOABITES, MIDIANITES

The various nations inhabiting the Promised Land, whose iniquity had come to the full and who were to be dispossessed by Israel, were not related to Abraham; but the Edomites, Moabites and Midianites, who dwelt to the south and the east of the Promised Land, were of blood relationship to Israel. The Midianites were children of **[R5316 : page 284]** Abraham by Keturah. The Moabites were children of Lot, Abraham's nephew. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. The Divine Program was that Israel might leave these related peoples unmolested, except when they made the attack.

When the time came to enter Canaan from Kadesh, the nearest route would have been through Edom. The Israelites asked permission to cross Edom without injuring their people, and offered to make good any damage of any kind. They were refused permission, and, in harmony with the covenant between Esau and Jacob, Israel's host detoured to the south and passed through the land of Moab – the land of the children of Lot.

This detour of so vast a company through the desert was disheartening, "and the soul of the people was much discouraged." Again there came murmurings against Moses, who really represented God to them. Their murmurings were promptly punished – they were not protected from the serpents prevailing in that vicinity. The result was terrible. Many died from the serpents, until Moses made a brazen one and erected it on a pole. Throughout all the Camp went messages, directing the people to look to the brazen serpent, exercise faith and be healed of their sickness.

POINT THE SIN-BITTEN TO THE SAVIOR

Thus not only were the Natural Israelites corrected, chastened, punished, but a lasting lesson was written for the benefit of Spiritual Israelites. We see that the fiery serpent of sin has bitten our race, that we are all dying, and that only by the exercise of faith in the Crucified One can any be healed. Our mission has been during the reign of Sin and Death to point the sin-bitten to the Savior. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," said Jesus. – John 3:14; 12:32.

In the present time, comparatively few hear the Message, or see with the eye of faith the Crucified One. The great mass are dying in heathen darkness; only the few have had opportunity to exercise faith in Christ. Thank God, the day is nearing when He who was lifted up at Calvary, and afterward lifted up in resurrection power, will be manifested in power and great glory – "the true Light which will lighten every man which cometh into the world!" If they do not respond, the fault will be their own. (Matthew 24:30; John 1:9-11.) That glorious condition will come through Messiah's Kingdom, for which still we are praying, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven."

