



WILDERNESS EXAMPLES

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INTRODUCTION

The experiences of the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings are used in the epistles of the New Testament as examples for believers in this Gospel era to learn from. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, clearly sets forth the failures of the Israelites as conduct to be avoided carefully. The passage from Hebrews 3:7-4:1 is used as memory work to accompany this quarter's lessons. The author of the letter to the Hebrews also warns us not to be unbelieving like the Israelites in the wilderness, but to enter into the promised land of God's rest by faith.

While the majority of lessons from this era are of a negative type, there are also positive examples to be followed from the life and character of Moses, as well as from the Levites and the laws and offerings of Leviticus.

Since "these things...are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come," it is appropriate to study this portion of the books of Moses carefully and prayerfully. The twelve lessons of this quarter are from the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

THE VOLUNTARY OFFERINGS

Read: Leviticus 1 - 7

Memory Verse: Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: Hebrews 3:7,8

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *God gives us the opportunity to draw near to Him in worship as He allowed the Israelites to have fellowship through various offerings.*
2. *Our praise and worship and thanksgiving must be voluntary on our part.*
3. *Jesus is the perfect type of the whole burnt offering, but we, too, may offer ourselves up as a burnt offering for a sweet savour to the Lord.*

I Leviticus: On the first day of the first month, the tabernacle was set up (Ex.40:2). On the twentieth day of the second month (50 days later) the pillar of cloud was taken up and the children of Israel left Mount Sinai and went on to the wilderness of Paran (Num.10:11-12). Between these two dates, while the children of Israel were still at Sinai, many interesting and important events took place. The entire book of Leviticus belongs to this period. God's instructions regarding sacrifices, diet, sanitary rules and holy days were given in these fifty days. The name Leviticus means: pertaining to the Levites. The tribe of Levi had been chosen to serve the Lord in and about the tabernacle. The priests were of this tribe. The book of Leviticus has been called "The handbook for priests". In this third book of Moses, the functions of the priests are detailed. From it we may surely learn some lessons, for the Gospel-age Christians are called a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9). The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe five distinct voluntary offerings which the children of Israel could bring to the Lord. Although it is true that the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary has done away with the necessity for animal sacrifices, in another sense these voluntary offerings are exam-

ples of offerings which New Testament believers may make to the Lord today.

II The Burnt Offering: The offering up of a whole burnt offering unto the Lord was to be made by only those who of their "own voluntary will," chose to do so. This was not an offering that was obligatory. There were several acceptable animals for this offering. It could be a bullock from the herd (a young bull) or a male goat or sheep. Whichever was chosen, it had to be without blemish. For those who could not offer a bullock, goat or sheep, turtledoves or pigeons were acceptable. So the Lord made it possible for the poorest of the people to make this richest of all sacrifices. The worshipper was instructed to lay his hand upon the head of the animal before it was killed. This was an action that signified that the beast was taking the worshipper's place. The worshipper then had to kill the animal on the north side of the altar "before the Lord". The priest then sprinkled the blood "round about upon the altar...by the door of the tabernacle". Next, the priest cut the animal into pieces and saw that the fire and wood were in order on the altar. The inward parts and legs had to be washed with water. All but the skin was placed on the wood of the altar and then burned, "an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord". The skin of the animal became the property of the officiating priest. If pigeons or turtledoves were used the procedure was slightly different, but blood was shed and the whole was burned.

To be sure, the Lord Jesus is a perfect example of a whole burnt offering. His body was yielded up as a living and dying sacrifice. But this offering represents, also, those who are moved to offer up themselves as whole burnt offerings. It might be called the offering of total consecration. In one way the figure fits the believers better than the Lord, for Jesus did not need his inward parts cleansed, but we do. Our inward parts and our hearts are corrupt and deceitful until sanctified by the washing of the water by the word. There are many believers who seek God's blessing on their activities, but too few offer themselves wholly on the altar of sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

Not just a part
Or half of my heart
I will give all to thee.

III The Meat Offering: This is the only offering (despite its name) that had no meat in it. The "meat" of the King James version is used for meal. This offering was to be made when "any will offer a meat offering". Fine flour, with oil poured thereon and frankincense, is its description (ch.2:1). These were the raw materials of baking. This offering could also be in the form of cakes or wafers, baked or fried. In any case, it was to be unleavened. The priest was to take a small sample of the offering and burn it for a memorial unto the Lord. The rest then became the food for the priests. This offering was to be sprinkled with salt. It was to be considered "most holy".

This offering represents everyday life. Flour for bread is the staff of life. It was used every day. So the worshipper signified his desire to do everyday chores in fellowship with and for the Lord. This we may do also. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men (Col.3:23). Jesus has set us a good example, for all that He did was for the glory of God. No leaven of insincerity or mixture of motives. Let us do likewise.

IV The Peace Offerings: This offering was made by those who desired to have fellowship with God and His priests. It was not made to atone for sin or to avert judgment, but simply to enjoy fellowship. This offering could be a bull or cow (male or female). It might also be sheep or goat, male or female. In this case, all the fat and the inward parts were burned as an offering before the Lord. Here the Lord specified that the children of Israel should eat no fat or blood. "All the fat is the Lord's." After the blood was sprinkled about the altar and the fat and inward parts burned on the altar, the worshipper was to wave the breast of the sacrifice before the Lord. The priest was also to "heave" the right shoulder of the sacrifice before the Lord. These parts then became the priests' portion. The worshipper was to bring unleavened cakes with his offering and leavened bread. A token was waved before the Lord and then priests and worshippers could enjoy a thanksgiving feast. Our testimonies and praises to the Lord with offerings and vows to God are the Gospel counterpart to this peace offering. "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15).

V The Sin Offering and the Trespass Offering: When anyone real-

ized that they had broken a commandment of the Lord they were instructed to make a sin offering. Instructions are give even for the priest or ruler who might, because of ignorance, sin. They were to offer a bullock. The common Israelite could offer goat or lamb (in this case a female) for his sin. The Lord was anxious for Israel to get sin out of the way so there could be fellowship. The trespass offerings were for less serious failings, but God was anxious that nothing should come between His people and Himself, so provision was made for the atonement and forgiveness of even the little transgressions. The trespass offering could be a sheep or goat (female in this case also), or it could be two turtledoves or pigeons. If that was too difficult, the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour would be accepted. For a trespass in holy things (more serious) a ram was to be offered.

The lesson here for us is clear. God wants us to keep the way of fellowship open. Our sins and trespasses are to be confessed at once. Things are to be made right where we have done wrong. The Lord is anxious for us to be always clean. The blood of Jesus Christ can and will continually cleanse us if we are careful to confess every sin and trespass at once and seek His forgiveness. "Let nothing between thy soul and thy Savior."

In ordaining these special voluntary offerings the Lord made a wonderful provision for Israel to draw near to Him and enjoy fellowship with God. This arrangement also met the need, in some measure at least, for the support of the priests. The Lord loves His people and desires to have fellowship with them. He also delights to provide the necessities of life for those who are in His employ.

We need not shed the blood of another vicarious sacrifice, Christ finished that once for all. But there are offerings and sacrifices that we can make. They should be voluntary on our part. They should be motivated by a sincere desire to have fellowship with the Lord and to serve Him in any and every way possible. There must be some who are willing to become a "whole burnt offering".

THE SABBATH, THE FEASTS, AND THE HOLY DAYS

Read: Leviticus 23, 25 Exodus 23:14-19
 Deuteronomy 16:1-17 Exodus 34:18-28
 Numbers 29

Memory Verse: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Hebrews 3:9

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The principle of one day of rest and worship predates the law of Sinai and is an eternal principle of God's kingdom.*
2. *Why we observe the first day of the week instead of the seventh.*
3. *The value of God-centered holidays and vacations.*
4. *The value of remembering and commemorating God's special blessings.*

I The Sabbath: Several things set apart the nation of Israel from all other nations on the face of the earth. Circumcision was one thing, and the observance of the Sabbath was another. Their unique dietary and sanitary laws were also unparalleled in the nations about Israel.

The observance of a Sabbath has its roots in the creation. When God had, in six days created the earth, He rested on the seventh day. Jesus explained further that the Sabbath was made for man. That is, God introduced it to His people not as a restraint to them, but for their own physical benefit. Continued work, without one day in seven for rest, is not healthy for mankind. When the Lord introduced it to Israel, it was in connection with the gathering of manna. From the very first, the Israelites provoked the Lord by disregarding the Sabbath. God thought it important enough to include its observance in the ten commandments.

The Lord also commanded Israel to allow the land a Sabbath every seven years. For six years the ground might be tilled

and cultivated and harvested, but the seventh year it was to be left idle. The wisdom of such an arrangement has only in modern times been recognized. Israel was not true to its trust. They broke the weekly Sabbaths regularly, and seldom, if ever, allowed the land its seventh-year rest. It was for this transgression that Israel was punished with seventy years of captivity in Babylon (see II Chron.36:21). Observing the Sabbath was the condition God gave to Israel if they were to keep possession of the promised land.

II The First Day: With the dawn of the Christian era, the disciples and the early believers observed the first day of the week as the day for special observance. Some of the Jewish Christians observed both the seventh and the first days as Sabbaths. The Gentile believers, who soon were in the majority, had no reason to observe the seventh day and so its use was abandoned.

The reason for the changeover to the first day is to be found in the two great Holy Days of the church. The resurrection of Jesus took place on the first day of the week. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost also took place on the first day of the week. These two great historic events, both occurring on the first day, give reason enough for the change from observance of the seventh day to honoring the Lord by setting aside the first day for rest and worship.

Both of these Christian holy days are prefigured in Israel's holy days, and they are the only two which fall on the first day of the week. The earliest spring feast of the firstfruits took place on the day after the passover Sabbath (see Lev. 23:11). The feast of weeks which came to be known as the feast of Pentecost also took place on "the morrow after the seventh sabbath" (Lev.23:16). So the two foundation events of the Christian Church took place on the first day of the week, and the observance of the first day instead of the seventh has naturally and logically resulted.

As to how the modern disciple should observe the "Lord's day," worship and rest are the proper criteria. Missionaries who work in lands where a day of rest is not observed suffer great hindrances to systematic worship. We are fortunate to live in a society which (for whatever reason) allows for a day (or 2 or 3) of rest in every week. A caution is appropriate here. The believer ought not to use the Lord's day as a day of recreation or pleasure. The Lord reproved Israel for doing their own pleasure on the sabbath (Isa.58:13). So the Lord's day ought to be kept as a day exclusively for rest and worship. The Lord sanctioned emergency work and works of deliver-

ance. This was to counteract the Pharisees' silly traditional prohibitions that made a transgressor of Jesus for healing an afflicted person on the sabbath. Remember, the observance of one day in seven as a day of rest and worship is for our own good, physically and spiritually.

III The Three Feasts: The Lord made provision that the children of Israel should have three weeks of vacation every year. These weeks were to be worship centered. All the males were required to appear before the Lord (the place of worship) on these occasions. They were to come with an offering each time. The first feast was the Passover, commemorating the exodus from Egypt and prefiguring the Lamb of Calvary. This feast took place in spring (March or April). The children of Israel were to eat unleavened bread for six days and then celebrate a "solemn assembly".

Seven weeks later another feast was to be observed. The servants and the Levites were to be especially remembered at the Feast of Weeks. Tradition has it that the occasion of this feast was the giving of the ten commandments at Mount Sinai. If true, the comparison is interesting, for it was on the day of this feast which came to be known as Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit was poured out for the first time and the law of God was written by the Holy Spirit on the fleshy tables of men's hearts rather than on the tablets of stone.

The third feast was the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). This feast took place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. It followed the most important day of atonement by five days. God desired Israel to remember, that even though they were given a land to call their own, they were still pilgrims on earth. It was to remind them of their wilderness journey from Egypt, when they dwelt in booths. The men who were required to appear at the place of worship on this occasion were to bring gifts and make vows unto the Lord. The feast of tabernacles came at the season when the harvests were completed. This was to be cause for rejoicing and sharing, but also for remembering the afflictions of the past.

Jesus used the occasions of these feasts to good advantage. He often went up to Jerusalem for one or another of these feasts. With people gathered from all over He had opportunity to teach the truths of the kingdom of God.

We, too, may use the holy days to good advantage by special meetings and calling to mind the true ground for such celebrations. We should and do deplore the commercialization of

Christmas, Easter, and the foolish method of celebration, but we can use the occasions to proclaim the incarnation and resurrection of our Lord. Let us never get caught in the secular celebrations of these feasts, but rather use them for the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

IV Other Holy Days: The morrow after the passover sabbath, the feast of the firstfruits was observed. This as mentioned before was a figure of the resurrection day (Lev.23:9-14).

The seventh month had a holiday which was for blowing of trumpets. Preceding the day of Atonement, it has become the Jewish new year. The day of Atonement was not a feast, but a fast. It was most important. On this day the High Priest made atonement for the sins of all Israel. Its importance to the children of Israel cannot be overestimated. There is no equivalent holiday for the believers today. The limited access to the mercy seat of the old era has been superseded by an open door of mercy and forgiveness to believers. Not once in a year, but daily we may come, and that boldly, to the throne of God, and there because of our High Priest, we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

A grand year of Jubilee was ordained by God for the release of slaves and restoration of lost properties. This great feast was probably never kept, at least there is no scriptural mention of its observance. It was a glorious figure of the Gospel age and of the ministry of Jesus and His preachers who proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and liberty to the captives of Satan. The inscription on the American Liberty Bell comes from this feast of Jubilee: Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. God's Gospel still proclaims liberty to all who believe.

ISRAEL'S UNIQUE DIETARY AND SANITARY LAWS

Read: Leviticus 11 - 15 Luke 5:12-15
 Romans 14 I Corinthians 8

Memory Verse: Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. Hebrews 3:10

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *God showed His love for Israel by giving them guidelines for eating, and for isolating the sick, that would prevent disease and keep His people healthy.*
2. *The eating and drinking of believers should glorify God.*
3. *The amazing rules of quarantine and frequent washing under running water have only been recognized and imitated in the last 200 years by medical people.*
4. *Leprosy is a type of sin. Like leprosy, sin must be recognized, the sinner must confess his uncleanness, and be washed in the blood of our Lord to be restored.*

I Clean and Unclean Meats: We have already noted in past lessons that the children of Israel were forbidden to eat the blood of any animal, or the fat (Lev.7:22-27). The reason given for the prohibition of blood was that the animal's life was in the blood. God did not want His people to partake of animal life. Oswald Smith has recorded the gruesome account of northern Canadian Indians drinking the warm blood of living dogs whose throats they cut. He tells how the blood-thirsty drinkers became demon possessed and ran about on all fours barking like dogs for several hours. It is an interesting comparison to note that although the Israelites were commanded to drink no blood, the followers of Christ are exhorted to eat the flesh and drink the blood (spiritually) of the Son of God.

The prohibition against the eating of fat seems primarily to emphasize the giving of the best, the richest portion of the sacrifice to God. The health aspect of this instruction was a side-benefit. Certainly, today we hear much about the benefits of a low-fat diet. The all wise God knew the dangers of too much fat and provided restraints for His people's own good.

The Lord gave Israel instructions as to what meat they should eat. These instructions were motivated by love. The Lord wanted to prevent unnecessary suffering and disease. The Lord gave guidelines concerning animals and fish. All animals with cloven hooves and which "chewed the cud" were to be considered clean, or edible. Those with only one of these requirements were to be considered unclean. Those with neither characteristic were also unclean and not to be eaten. The clean and therefore edible animals included cows and bullocks, sheep and goats. Several unclean animals are specifically named to avoid mistake. Among these prohibited are the camel, the hare (rabbit) and the swine (pig).

The guidelines for fish were simple. Only fish with scales and fins were to be eaten. All shellfish and crab and shrimp, etc., were excluded. For eating of fowl, the prohibited birds were listed. For the most part they are scavenger birds. Quails, pheasant, chickens, ducks and geese are not on the prohibited list. Some large insects (also called fowl) are specified as edible, if not appetizing. Locusts and grasshoppers and beetles make the menu, while bugs with more feet are prohibited.

Remember, God's purpose in all of this was to help His people to stay healthy. We are aware today of certain hazards inherent in many of these prohibited meats. We are often warned of the danger of disease from improperly cooked pork. The popular shellfish and shrimp are often excluded from menus during the hot summer months because of the danger of rapid bacterial development in them. There is surely some truth in the saying, "You are what you eat." God would not have His people to be scavengers, feeding on the filth and corruption of this earth. So we have the prohibition of eating scavenger creatures. Cooking methods in Old Testament times were primitive and there was great danger in consuming these prohibited foods. These prohibitions have nothing to do with salvation. It is simply God's love manifested in keeping His people from harmful food. Eating these unclean foods will not keep you out of heaven, but it might get you there sooner than you expect.

The Jewish religious leaders have developed these guidelines

into a complex system. It was more important to them than the weightier matters of God's law. Jesus rebuked them for their distorted priorities. Jesus did not eat unclean food, but He derided the scribes and Pharisees for their over-emphasis on such things.

The Apostle Paul was convinced that no meat was unclean of itself, but he also declared that rather than offend a weak believer he would consider eating no meat at all. While the Christian believer enjoys certain liberties from the Old Testament types and traditions, the New Testament definitely teaches selfdenial in matters of eating and drinking. Certainly, to avoid stumbling the recovered alcoholic, the believer ought to abstain from alcoholic drink. It is important that we be willing to allow the Lord to rule over our appetites. So even in matters of food and drink let us do all for the glory of God.

II Sanitary Wisdom: Until the middle of the eighteenth century, quarantine, or isolation of those with communicable diseases was virtually unknown. The value of "scrubbing" by those ministering to the sick and in childbirth was also recognized only within the last 200 years.

God's great wisdom imparted to Moses 3500 years ago stands alone in the treatment of the sick. Those among Israel who developed certain symptoms of "leprosy" were to be brought to the priest. The definition of leprosy is rather broad and seems to include venereal disease and bubonic plague as well as the disease we know today as leprosy. The priest was the judge as to what was, and what was not a virulent leprosy. Safeguards of human rights were also built into this amazing health care system. The victim was to be quarantined for one week and then re-examined. If the affected area had spread, then the dread declaration was made, "It is leprosy." The victim was expelled from all social communication, except from other lepers, and had to live outside the camp.

Provision was made, however, for reentry into normal social life for those who recovered. While leprosy was incurable by the means of the wisdom of this world, the Lord, Jehovah, was and is the great physician. He does His best to prevent disease among His people, but when it breaks out He has all power to heal all disease and affliction.

In the instructions given in dealing with the lepers and their cleansing, much washing is taught. The bed, the seats, the clothing, the saddle, all were to be washed after use or contact with the afflicted leper. Washing under "running water"

is commanded. This was the great wisdom of God. Not until the eighteenth century was it discovered that the unwashed hands of the doctors and midwives caused such a high mortality rate amongst women in childbirth and their infants. When the scrubbing under running water, advised so long ago in the days of Moses, was practiced, mortality rates dropped dramatically.

The Jews in New Testament times were overly concerned with outward washing, while Jesus emphasized the cleansing of the heart and the inward desires and motives. Of course, the Christian should be clean outwardly, but the all important thing is inward cleansing.

We may, at times, have to avoid contacts with certain individuals who defile us by evil conversation or actions. Paul taught that those who claim to be Christians, but practice adultery, covetousness, or drunkenness, should be cut off from fellowship with other Christians. Sin contaminates! While we cannot avoid contact with the sinners of the world altogether, we are urged to choose as companions and partners only true practicing Christians.

Sometimes, when visiting the sick in a hospital, the visitor is requested to wear a mask and a robe and gloves and then to scrub when leaving. This is always a little frightening. It makes you want to wash again as soon as possible and as thoroughly as possible. Ought we not to feel just so when we come in contact with the defiling sinners around us. Oh, how we need the precious blood of our Lord to keep cleansing us from all sin.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

THE SINS OF MIRIAM, AARON AND OF ISRAEL

Read: Numbers 11, 12

Memory Verse: So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Hebrews 3:11

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Complaining displeases the Lord.*
2. *The appetites of the body must become subject to the rule of the Holy Spirit.*
3. *Continual problems can discourage even the greatest leaders.*
4. *The Lord's desire is to raise up whole-hearted helpers for His leaders.*
5. *It is a serious offence, in the sight of the Lord, to speak against the faithful leaders of God's kingdom.*
6. *Leaders do well to seek meekness like that of Moses.*

I Complaining Punished: From the first day of the first month, when the tabernacle was set up, until the twentieth day of the second month (50 days) the children of Israel remained encamped at Mount Sinai. Then the cloud of God's presence was taken up from the tabernacle and the children of Israel broke camp and set forth as they were instructed to do.

The tabernacle had to be disassembled and carried by the Levites. Every family had to tend to their own belongings. As the ark of the covenant was carried forth by the chosen Levites, Moses cried out, "Rise up, Lord and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." When the forward move was ended, then Moses again called: "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:35-36). This must have been an impressive occurrence. How important it is for us, that when we take a journey that the

Lord go before us and with us. In all our journeying and returning let us seek to have God's Presence always with us.

Perhaps the march was tiresome and difficult. The people began to complain. The Lord heard their complaining and was displeased. It is good for us to remember that the Lord hears what we say. Complaining still displeases the Lord. A fire from the Lord broke out on the outskirts of the camp and consumed those who camped there. The people cried to Moses who in turn cried to the Lord till the fire was quenched. The tabernacle with God's Presence was in the center of the camp and these complainers were as far from His Presence as they could possibly be. Often in the school room we see the trouble makers choose the seats as far from the teacher as possible. In the kingdom of God it is important that we draw nigh to God and that we learn to abide close to Him. Peter got into trouble when he followed "afar off."

II Remembering: This was not the end of trouble, however, for soon the "mixt multitude" began to lust for flesh to eat. The expression "mixt multitude" refers to those Egyptians who became fearers and followers of Israel and their God through the plagues (Ex.12:38). Perhaps it included some Israelites who had intermarried with Egyptians. At any rate, their memory was very selective and deficient. They remembered the spicy food of Egypt, but forgot the oppression and slavery and devastation of that land. They complained bitterly at the steady diet of manna, which was supernaturally provided for them daily. Both Moses and the Lord heard this whining in the tents of Israel. The anger of the Lord was kindled and Moses, too, was displeased and disheartened by the continual nagging of the people who demanded flesh to eat from Moses. Moses felt the burden of caring for all these complaining people. For a little while Moses seemed unable to cast this burden upon the Lord. He was disheartened and asked to be released from life. Many of God's faithful servants have at times been discouraged by the constant doubts and fears and complaints of God's people. We do well to vow never to complain and find fault with our God-given leaders.

Sometimes Christian believers, like these deficient Israelites, remember the pleasures of the world, but forget the bondage and the guilt. The parties and entertainments and feasting of the world give momentary pleasure, but they leave the victims empty and guilty, for he who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

God promised Moses two things. First He promised to give Moses help to bear the daily burden. Also the Lord promised to give flesh to Israel so they could eat it for a month till it came out of their nostrils.

III Help For Moses: Before Israel came to Mount Sinai, Moses' father-in-law had advised him to share the responsibilities of governing with able and reliable leaders chosen from among the people. Moses took his advice and began to act upon it. Now about one year later God also acted to give Moses help. Seventy elders of the men of Israel were chosen by Moses. On them God bestowed some of the Spirit which was upon Moses. The elders gathered at the tabernacle and as the Lord put the Spirit upon them they began to prophesy. Even two who had been detained in the camp and were not present at the tabernacle, began to prophesy in the camp. Joshua, Moses' right hand servant, was envious for Moses' sake, but the faithful leader advised the zealous young man that he wished that all of God's people would prophesy.

This was a remarkable incident. Similar things have occurred when strong leaders of the work of the Lord have ordained elders. Sometimes these elders became very like the leaders who ordained them. Most wonderful of all is the promise that the Spirit of Christ, our incomparable leader, can be ours as we seek and claim His Holy Spirit. Then we can be like Him.

IV Flesh and a Plague: Once before, God had given Israel a supply of quails when they were first running low on supplies and before the manna was given. Now once again, despite the miraculous provision of the daily manna, Israel lusted for flesh and the Lord gave it abundantly. When God promised Moses to give one month's supply, even Moses questioned God. He reminded the Lord that there were six-hundred-thousand footmen. To supply one month's provision of flesh for such a host seemed incomprehensible. "Shall the flocks and herds be slain?" Moses asked, "or all the fish of the sea be gathered to suffice them?" But God's hand was not limited, and to be sure such a supply of quails fell round about the camp by reason of a strong wind from the Lord, as to be reckoned innumerable. For several miles (a day's journey) on all sides of the camp the quails lay on the ground like a heavy snowfall, three feet deep. They gathered them and cleaned and dried them. They did indeed have a month's supply. But when they ate, the

Lord sent a plague upon them and many died. The Psalmist records of this incident: that the Lord granted their request (for flesh) but sent leanness into their souls (Ps.106:15). Many of the people that lusted for flesh and despised the manna provided by God were buried there in that place called Kib-roth-hataavah. Let us be sure that we never despise the word of God which is our bread, and the simple unchanging supply of Jesus Himself, the bread of life, and lust for the thrills and pleasures of this world.

V Finding Fault With Moses: Aaron and Miriam had misgivings about the wife which Moses had taken. They spoke against him and exalted themselves. They boasted that God had spoken by them as well as by Moses. This was no doubt true. God had also spoken by the seventy elders on whom the spirit that was on Moses, had come. But no one had drawn so nigh to God as Moses had.

God heard the criticizing of Miriam and Aaron. At this point, the inspired record reveals that the man Moses was the meekest of all men on the face of the earth. He never would have taken steps to vindicate himself. But God did take steps.

It would be good for all of God's servants to become meek like Moses. Too much time and energy is wasted in the defense of personal actions and theories by ministers of the Gospel. Some have ruined their ministries by fighting and arguing to vindicate themselves.

God was able to defend Moses. He is able to see that His workers are not abused today as well. God called for Miriam, Aaron, and Moses to come into His Presence. There, He rebuked Aaron and Miriam in the presence of Moses for their slander. Miriam, who must have been the chief culprit became leprous. Aaron interceded for her to Moses and Moses to the Lord. She was healed through the prayers of the very one she had criticized, but was shut out of the camp in disgrace for one week.

While the servant of the Lord need not be overly concerned with personal criticism, the people of God had better be careful of speaking ill of God's servants. Let us regard them highly for their work's sake. This is pleasing to the Lord.

ISRAEL FAILS TO ENTER

Read: Numbers 13, 14; Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11

Memory Verse: Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Hebrews 3:12

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The promises of God are sure. Unbelief motivated the spies reconnaissance.*
2. *We can expect to face giant enemies when we enter the life of the Spirit.*
3. *The believer can face any difficulty and be victorious because God is with him.*
4. *If we persist in disobedience and unbelief, there is a point where the failures become irreparable.*

I Twelve Spies: The children of Israel finally approached the promised land. They appealed to Moses to send spies to see the land and to discover which way to attack (Deut.1:22). Moses approved their suggestion and brought it before the Lord who told Moses to send them. So by the commandment of the Lord the spies went out. Joshua and Caleb were among the twelve chosen to go. They went in the time of the first ripe grapes. At Hebron the spies saw the giants. They also found abundant fruit. At Eshcol they cut down a great cluster of grapes. Two men carried it between them on a pole. The spies returned after forty days.

The spies reported to Moses and Aaron and the whole congregation, that the land indeed was a land flowing with milk and honey as the Lord had said. The promises of the Lord can stand the test of investigation. The spies also reported seeing the giants there. They told of seeing great walled cities and told of the many inhabitants; Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites.

Caleb interrupted the pessimistic report with a challenge;

"Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it" (Num.13:30). He remembered the miraculous work of the Lord and counted on His help. But the other spies, with the exception of Joshua, saw the difficulties. "We be not able," they concluded. The inhabitants were stronger than Israel. They were men of great stature. The spies reported that they were, "in their own sight as grasshoppers." The whole congregation began to weep at this report. Then they began to murmur against Moses and Aaron again. "Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt or...in this wilderness," they wailed. They were sure their wives and children would be a prey to these enemies, so they decided to choose a captain to lead them back to Egypt.

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the whole assembly of Israel. Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes and remonstrated with the people. They reminded them that the land was a very desirable one. "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us," they reasoned. Surely the children of Israel had every reason to know that the Lord had delight in them. They had experienced a host of miracles, from the plagues in Egypt to the supernatural provision of food and water in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb further admonished the people not to rebel against the Lord. They assured the people that the enemies' defences were departed from them, but that the Lord Himself was with Israel. "They are bread for us," they prodded. But the stubborn Israelites refused to hearken, and rather demanded that Joshua and Caleb be stoned. Only the intervention of the manifestation of the glory of the Lord in the sight of all Israel prevented the carrying out of the threat.

We must learn from this story, which is recorded for our learning and admonition, that giant sized difficulties in the Christian life should neither surprise nor discourage us. The Lord has not promised, that with the new birth, automatically everything becomes pleasing to us. Jesus has even suggested that we cannot be His disciples unless we are willing to "take up the cross and follow Him." Persecution sometimes arises against new Christians. If so, the believer ought not to rebel and go back to the world.

There are monstrous faults in our natures that could easily discourage a new disciple. As we read God's word we begin to see these giants more clearly. But that same word promises to us weapons to overcome every obstacle and win the victory ultimately. Business associations sometimes pose a strong threat

to a consistent Christian life. This giant, too, can and will be overcome as we honor the Lord by our obedience, for He honors those who honor Him. To young people, the pressure of their peers is a great difficulty in living a holy life in school. There are other difficulties which the enemy uses to attempt to discourage those about to enter into the Christian warfare. The Lord offers to them, however, the whole armor of God and certain ultimate victory. Let us be encouraged to fight on and claim our promised land.

II Inescapable Punishment: The wrath of the Lord was kindled by the unbelief of Israel. He threatened to smite the whole congregation with a great pestilence and to disinherit them. Once again, the Lord offered to make a new Israel from descendants of Moses. The selfless leader again interceded for Israel and was successful in that God did not cut off the entire assembly at once. But Israel had provoked the Lord once too often. "As truly as I live," the Lord declared, "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen my glory and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness and have tempted (provoked) me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But my servant: Caleb, (and Joshua) because he had another spirit" (Num.14:21-24).

The judgment was postponed for some, but it was pronounced and they only continued on as condemned souls. The Lord related the punishment to the crime. Forty days the spies had searched out the promised land. (This searching itself was an act of unbelief). Now God pronounced the sentence: forty years of wilderness wandering until that whole generation should die. A year for a day, was the Lord's judgment. The children under 20 years of age, which the elders feared would become prey to the inhabitants of the land, God promised to bring victoriously into that land when the carcasses of their unbelieving parents were wasted in the wilderness. Execution of the punishment began at once, for ten of the spies (all but Joshua and Caleb) died by a plague which broke out at once. Early the next morning the people decided to go and fight against the inhabitants of the land, but the Lord was not with them. Moses warned them not to go presumptuously. Yet they went and were slaughtered. They had waited too long to obey. Now it was too late. This is an important lesson for us from Israel's history.

There comes a time and a place where if we do not obey the Lord the consequences become irreversible. It is commonly supposed and taught that sinners can delay repentance as long as they please and come whenever they choose. This story and the record of the destruction of the entire population who ran to the ark in Noah's day, only to find that it was too late, indicate that the day of response to the Lord dare not be delayed. Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart as the children of Israel did in the wilderness. Esau also, after he realized that he had lost the patriarchal blessing repented with tears. He was too late. Remember the foolish virgins of our Lord's parable. They obtained oil at last. But, alas, they were too late and shut out of the marriage supper. Let us be sure that we do not provoke the Lord by our delay in yielding our obedience to Him. Whether it be a matter of initial repentance and salvation, or whether it be for total consecration. Say yes and yield to Jesus now. You will save a long wilderness journey and ultimate eternal loss.

III These Ten Times: The Lord did not just pick this number ten out of a hat. Ten specific provocations are indeed recorded in the narrative up to this point in the history of the exodus. The first was at the brink of the Red Sea where they murmured against Moses (see Ex.14:11-12). Next, they provoked the Lord at the bitter waters of Marah (Ex.15:23-24). Then Israel angered the Lord in desiring to return to Egypt because of the fleshpots they enjoyed there (Ex.16:2-3). Another provocation is recorded concerning the gathering of the manna (Ex.16:24-28). The fifth failure was again regarding water (Ex.17:1-4). The provocation concerning the golden calf was the next glaring offence (Ex.32:1-10), and this was followed by the complaining which brought a burning fire to the edge of camp (Num.11:1-3). Again the people lusted for meat (Num.11:4,33). Miriam and Aaron jealously spoke against Moses and provoked the judgment of God on Miriam (Num.12:1-13). Finally, the failure to enter into the promised land and the matter of the spies, fills the cup of wrath with provocations (Num.14). This is recorded for our learning and admonition. Let us be sure that we learn the lesson. How often have we provoked the Lord? Let us consider seriously the danger of irreversible judgment if we persist in hardening our hearts against the faithful dealing of the Holy Spirit.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows, and in miseries."

--William Shakespeare

THE REBELLION OF KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM

Read: Numbers 16, 17; Hebrews 13:7,17,24
I Thessalonians 5:12-13

Memory Verse: But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *No jealousy of God-ordained leaders should be tolerated in the Christian's heart.*
2. *We should not let the seed of envy take root in our hearts toward any of the congregation who may be honored more than we.*
3. *Selfish ambition blinds the heart to the truth.*
4. *Fruitfulness is God's stamp of approval on the ministry.*
5. *To foment discord and to conspire against God's workers for selfish ambition is a dangerous offence. Prayer for God's ministers and whole-hearted cooperation brings blessing.*

1 God's Choice Ministers: Moses and Aaron had not set themselves up as the leaders of Israel. Moses was very reluctant to take the place of leadership. God had to assure him, cajole him, and finally almost threaten him, before he accepted the place of responsibility. Aaron was called because of Moses' reluctance to speak. The older brother of Moses was far from a perfect leader, yet he was God's choice. In a place of leadership all the faults of character and mistakes in judgment become highly visible. Moses and Aaron were chosen of God for their positions of leadership. Except for two or three instances Aaron had labored faithfully with Moses. Often the two leaders fell on their faces before the Lord to intercede for the rebellious people. "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy

courts," the psalmist wrote (Psalm 65:4). This was true of Moses and Aaron. They were uniquely blessed in that they had constant communion with the Lord. It had been the intention of the Lord to give all Israel access to Himself, for He had offered them the privilege to be a kingdom of priests. They rejected this arrangement, however, because they feared the spectacular manifestation of the presence of God at Mount Sinai. Israel had asked that Moses be the mediator between God and themselves. So God had originally called and chosen Moses and Aaron to the place of leadership, and Israel also, had chosen Moses to be their mediator with God.

II Jealousy and Envy: There are always some who envy those in positions of leadership. The honors of public recognition and the desire for power make the place of leadership seem desirable. The difficulties and aggravations of leadership are often overlooked. Why anyone would want to lead the rebels of Israel, is a mystery. Yet it is true to human nature that the difficulties are often overlooked and only the honors are considered.

Korah, a Levite like Moses and Aaron, began to envy his leaders. He undoubtedly felt that he was not inferior to them, especially to Aaron. He no doubt felt that he would make a better high priest than Aaron. Korah needed support for his ambitious plot. He enlisted the help of three men of the tribe of Reuben. They were neighbors in the camping layout. Korah, a descendant of Kohath the Levite was assigned the inner place to the south of the tabernacle (Num.3:29). The tribe of Reuben also was assigned to pitch their tents on the south side of the tabernacle (Num.2:10). Perhaps, Korah, excited with ambition, played upon the fact that the tribe of Reuben was given no honor in the encamping and marching arrangement. Reuben was, after all, the firstborn of Jacob. The rights of the firstborn were important in those days, yet Moses had ignored them. Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron, and Judah were singled out for honor; but Reuben was neglected. (The reason for this neglect is found in Gen.49:3-4).

Three princes of Reuben joined Korah in the conspiracy: Dathan, Abiram, and On. The last of these apparently repented before the conspiracy went too far, and saved himself and his family from the fate of the other two. Together these men influenced others until more than 250 strong men came in protest to Moses and Aaron. They complained that Moses and Aaron took too much authority upon themselves, and based their complaint

on the presumption that "all the congregation are holy". This supposition was likely rooted in the offer of God that Israel, if they obeyed all of the commandments of the Lord, would be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (see Ex.19:5-6). This covenant offer, however, was voided when Israel broke their part of the covenant in the matter of the golden calf.

When Moses heard the complaint he fell on his face before the Lord. Then he dealt with the conspiracy separately. Korah was told that on the morrow all who dared should come with censers and burn incense before the Lord. Moses reminded Korah that the Lord had blessed the sons of Levi greatly and had brought them nearest to Himself of all the tribes. He advised them that their grievance was not so much against Aaron as against the Lord! After all it was God who chose Aaron and fitted him for his priesthood.

Moses called for Dathan and Abiram to come before him. They answered him insolently and refused to come. This angered Moses and he asked the Lord to disregard their offering. He ordered Korah and all the men of the conspiracy to appear before the Lord on the morrow and allow the Lord Jehovah to reveal whom He approved as high priest. When they appeared on the morrow, at the door of the tabernacle the cloud of God's Presence descended. "Separate yourselves from this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment," the Lord advised. But Moses once again fell on his face and asked, "shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?" Then the Lord told Moses to separate the loyal children of Israel from the dwellings of Dathan and Abiram. Then these rebels insolently stood in the doors of their tents. Moses warned that if they died a natural death of old age, then the Lord had not sent him, but if an unheard of thing happened, and the earth opened and swallowed these men alive, then the congregation should understand that these men had indeed provoked the Lord.

III Judgment: Hardly had Moses done speaking when the earth shook and "clave assunder" swallowing up alive the whole band of rebels with all their belongings. Also, fire went out from the Lord and consumed the 250 who offered incense. So horrible was the scream of those who fell alive into the pit that Israel fled from its sound. The brasen censers were gathered up and broad plates were made as a covering for the altar of incense and as a reminder that none but God's chosen High Priest should offer incense thereon.

The next day the unteachable congregation began a new

complaint. Now they blamed Moses and Aaron for killing the people of God. Again God threatened to consume the whole congregation, but at Moses' intercession the judgment was stopped short of complete obliteration. Moses instructed Aaron to take his censer of incense and run between the people where a plague had broken out. Fourteen thousand and seven hundred died in this judgment.

As final proof that Aaron was indeed the High Priest chosen by the Lord, all the tribes were bidden to bring a rod of almond wood inscribed with the name of their tribe, to put in the Presence of God until the morrow. The next day when the 12 rods were retrieved a wonder had occurred. The rod of Aaron had sprouted and blossomed and borne mature almonds all in one night signifying that Aaron was God's choice for the Priesthood. This rod was preserved as a memorial and reminder to the people not to err in this respect again.

IV Regarding Our Leaders: What a healthy situation it would be if every minister would be a true mediator and intercessor for his flock. Self-seekers do not belong in the ministry. Further, how important that the congregation learn to regard their minister highly for his work's sake. If the ministers and pastors were prayed for more earnestly their effectiveness would increase. What a blessing it is for a minister of the Gospel to be surrounded by whole-hearted helpers and co-laborers who support the work of the Lord in every way possible. May every minister be worthy of such loyalty.

Also, let us learn not to envy any in the congregation who seem to be honored above their deserts. Let us be sure that we are peacemakers and peacekeepers, rather than such as sow discord among brethren by criticism, complaint, and gossip; for such are an abomination to the Lord.

MOSES' SHORTCOMING AND THE DEATHS OF MIRIAM AND AARON

Read: Numbers 20; Psalm 106:6-33

Memory Verse: For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; Hebrews 3:14

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *We must live so that we have no regrets in the hour of death.*
2. *If Moses, the great man of God, spoke unadvisedly and sanctified not the Lord in a moment of frustration, how watchful ought we to be.*
3. *Though God's great servants pass on, the work of God goes forward.*

1 After 38 Years: After the sad affair with Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the Lord mercifully draws the curtain over the wanderings and failures of Israel in the wilderness. They had chosen not to believe and obey God when He wanted them to enter into the promised land. Therefore the Lord "gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsel." And walk they did. for thirty-eight years. During these years, the entire generation of Israelites who were 20 years of age or older when Israel left Egypt, perished in the wilderness. Their wanderings must have been filled with mourning. If only the 600,000 footmen spoken of in Numbers 11:21 perished, it would mean an average of more than 40 deaths each day. Probably during this time Moses wrote Psalm 90 with its warning to "number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). This sad episode in the history of Israel is shrouded in obscurity. We only know that the entire generation perished in the wilderness.

It almost seems to be implied that the tribes of Israel scattered throughout the wilderness and led a nomadic life during this period. But at last the whole congregation (Num.20:1) assembled in the desert of Zin. It was at this time that Miriam died. She was buried there in the desert. Miriam ought not to

be remembered for her single momentary failure, but rather for her song of praise at the Red Sea (Ex.15:20), and for her faithful devotion to the Lord and to Moses for 120 years. Thank God for faithful women who serve God for their entire lifetime.

11 Meribah: When the people gathered together it was soon evident that the same nature was in this younger generation of Israelites. They began to murmur and complain just as their parents had done. They "chode with Moses" and asked why he had brought them out of Egypt. There was no water and the congregation blamed Moses. They also complained that this place was not a fruitful place at all. Moses and Aaron went from the congregation and fell on their faces before the Lord. His glory appeared unto them and the Lord instructed them just what to do. He told them to assemble the people and to take the rod and in the sight of all Israel, "speak ye unto the rock --- and it shall bring forth water" (Num.20:8).

Moses took the rod and called Israel together. Although the Lord does not seem to have been angry with these young people (we must also exercise patience toward the young) Moses was exasperated. Instead of speaking to the rock as God had instructed him, he scolded them and said, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Then in anger he lifted up the rod and smote the rock twice. Despite this deviation from God's direction, water gushed from the rock abundantly. But the Lord was displeased with Moses on this occasion. No doubt, Moses feared that this generation like the last would murmur and doubt and rebel until they, too, were shut out of the promised land. He may have despaired for the moment of the Israelites ever entering in. Despair destroys good judgment, and in this momentary crisis, Moses angered by the people, spoke unadvisedly with his lips. He did not sanctify God before the people. These young people had not seen all the wonders performed which their parents had seen. God did not hold them as responsible as their elders. His anger was not kindled against them as it had been in similar circumstances against their fathers. But Moses, discouraged and wearied for the moment, "blew his top." It cost him dearly. The Lord would not allow him to lead Israel into the promised land. He came under the same sentence as the generation he had served so well. God's justice is impartial. Moses later pled with the Lord to allow him to go into the land, but God told Moses not to speak of the matter again. Yet God did take Moses up Mount Pisgah's height and allowed him to see with 20-20 vision (despite his 120 years) the land of promise.

This failure of Moses must be kept in perspective, also. This man ranks with the topmost spiritual giants of all ages. God revealed Himself to Moses as to few individuals in all history. His gifts were incomparable. The wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Spirit enabled him to record the creation and fall of man, the flood, and the details of the lives of the patriarchs. Moses drew nigh to God and saw His back parts when he was with God in the mount. The wisdom of God which he shared with Israel regarding sanitary and dietary guidelines is unparalleled in history. Moses was truly a spiritual giant. If we had the task of leading and governing such a group of people, how often might we have failed and spoken unadvisedly with our lips. How faithful is the Divine record which plainly sets forth the failures of its greatest heroes. This, too, is unique in literature of olden times and is another proof of the inspiration of the scriptures.

IV The Changeable Priesthood: As the children of Israel set out once again for the land of promise they asked permission to pass through the land of Edom. These people of Edom were the descendants of Esau. They would not allow Israel to pass through even though they promised to touch nothing and pay for the water they and their cattle might drink. Thus Israel detoured a long and laborious route to mount Hor.

There God spoke to Moses and Aaron that the time had come for Aaron to be "gathered to his people." How thoughtful of God to reveal this not to Moses alone, who then would have had to tell Aaron, but to both of them together. Not a word of argument came from the lips of the first High Priest. God instructed Moses to take Eleazer, the son of Aaron, with Aaron and to bring them up into mount Hor.

Aaron, beautifully dressed in his High Priestly robes, with his son Eleazer at his side and Moses, his younger brother, set out to climb the mount. But what a touching scene was enacted here! Aaron, who has served as High Priest for almost forty years is stripped of his sacred vestments and after they are removed from him they are bestowed upon Eleazer, his son. Then Aaron died there in the mount. Moses and Eleazer, now wearing the vestment of the High Priest, descended from the mount. Moses, bereaved of his brother and associate of forty years; and Eleazer bereaved of his father and High Priest. The people of Israel saw the dramatic and poignant return and realized that Aaron was dead. They mourned for him for thirty days.

These great vessels of God were passing from the scene, but the progress of God's kingdom could not be stopped. Eleazer, took up the censer of incense and appeared before the mercy seat where only Aaron his father had appeared before him. God's man, Joshua, was serving his apprenticeship so that he would take the reins of leadership when Moses passed from the scene.

So it is in every era. God's great vessels serve Him faithfully and are gathered to their reward. The loss of these great saints, which seems so catastrophic at the time, cannot stop the progress of God's kingdom. He has a way of making something out of nothing. How important it is that when the time comes for us to lay aside the vestments of our service, that we shall have done the will of God and finished our course with joy.

There is a lesson here for us also; to believe God to prepare vessels to carry on the work when the great ministers and vessels of God pass on. How blessed it was that Aaron had a son like Eleazer to give his High Priestly garments to. Foresight and faith can prepare the way for a smooth transition when the torch is passed.

Let us not forget the good side of Aaron's faithful ministry. He was chosen by God. The rod that budded confirmed God's choice. Despite his weaknesses and infirmities, he faithfully served at Moses' side and often on his face beside his brother until he gave his robes to Eleazer.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT AND THE CROSS

Read: Numbers 20:14-21 John 3:14-21
 Numbers 21:1-9 John 12:20-36

Memory Verse: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:14-15

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Discouragement is often the beginning of murmuring and rebellion.*
2. *Murmuring is a serious offence in God's eyes.*
3. *Healing resulted from obedience to God's word, not from the brazen serpent.*
4. *Christ became sin for us that we might be free from the curse.*
5. *Whosoever will may experience the salvation of Christ even as anyone who looked to the brazen serpent, was cured.*

I Discouragement Breeds Rebellion: Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom requesting permission to pass through the Edomites' territory. Moses offered to pay for any water that the people and cattle might drink, and promised to do no damage to the fields or vineyards. The people of Edom were descendants of Esau the brother of Jacob whose name had been changed to Israel. Thus, Moses sent the request as a brother: "Thus saith thy brother, Israel...Let us pass...through thy country" (Num.20:14,17).

The king of Edom would not allow Israel to pass and threatened to come out to war against them if they attempted to pass

through. So Israel had to turn aside and make a long detour. The way led through a terrible desert. The heat is intense and unbearable in that area to this day. The entire congregation was now journeying away from the promised land. It was a discouraging situation. The people became very dissatisfied. Unfortunately, they did not have the wisdom which David possessed in a later era, when under worse circumstances (at Ziklag) he encouraged himself in the Lord (1 Sam.30:6).

Instead of encouraging themselves in the Lord, the Israelites began to murmur against the Lord and against Moses. They might have called to mind the mighty deliverances of the past and taken courage from the past victories, but instead they found fault with everything. They complained to Moses that they had no bread or water. They went so far as to say that they loathed this light bread which was daily provided by the Lord for their sustenance. They indicated that they would rather have remained in Egypt than endure these privations. How quickly they forgot the terrible oppression and bondage of Egypt. They seemed to remember only the plentiful spicy food.

The Lord was angry with Israel for their murmuring. Fiery serpents were sent among the people. Many were bitten and the venom was so strong that many died. Then the people realized that they had sinned. They came to Moses and confessed that they had done wrong in speaking against the Lord and against His servant, Moses. "Pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us," they pled. So Moses prayed for the people.

II A Serpent of Brass: The Lord instructed Moses to make a fiery serpent out of brass and set it upon a pole so that everyone in the camp could see it. The Lord promised that whoever had been bitten by the venomous serpents would be spared if they would look at the serpent on the pole. It was an easy remedy. Poor dying victims must have been carried to the foot of the elevated serpent and urged to fasten their eyes upon it. Children, too young to understand must have been carried in Mother's arms and somehow urged to look that they might live. All who beheld, lived. Of course, the virtue was not in the brazen serpent itself, the healing power came from the Lord and from the scene at Calvary some fifteen hundred years later which the brazen serpent prefigured.

Let us learn a lesson here, before proceeding any further in this study, of the serious nature of murmuring. We tend to minimize the seriousness of this sin. We even laugh because of the comic habit of seeing everything in a pessimistic way.

But to God who has promised to work all things for good to those who love Him, it is not humorous when His people complain about everything from taxes and high prices to the weather which was never so bad. Complaining about the young people and unfair situations, insecurity of jobs, the cost of living and a million other aggravations has become so common that no one even thinks of this as the sin of murmuring. Let us remember that it was murmuring, which began with discouragement which brought about this terrible judgment in which "Much people of Israel died" (Num.21:6). Let us nip discouragement in the bud, before it develops into murmuring. Continual and persistent praising the Lord is the antidote for this venom of hell. "Rejoice evermore,...In everything give thanks!"

III The Son of Man Lifted Up: Jesus referred to this incident in His conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus had explained the necessity of a new birth. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14,15). When God directed Moses to make the serpent of brass He was looking ahead to the day when the Savior, bearing our sins, would be lifted up, that all who would look to Him might be saved from the venom of sin which condemns to eternal death. The brazen serpent outlived its usefulness and later was worshipped as an idol. Hezekiah finally destroyed it 850 years later (II Kings 18:4). The cross of Christ has never lost its power. Today, those who look to the cross of Christ and the atonement made there for our sins and sicknesses are saved and healed just as those who, in the days of the apostles, looked to Christ and Calvary.

IV For This Cause Came I: It is commonly taught today that Jesus came to earth to reign as a political king over Israel, and only when that nation rejected Him did the cross become a part of God's secondary plan. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13:8). John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Here, to Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus mentions very clearly the cross on which He must be lifted up. This incident took place very early in the ministry of Jesus, long before the nation as a whole had rejected Him. So the cross was before Jesus from the very beginning.

On the Mount of Transfiguration He spoke with Moses and

Elijah of His decease (exodus) which He should accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). To the disciples, on several occasions, the Lord referred to His sacrificial death. Peter once rebuked the Lord for speaking so, but the Lord rebuked Peter. It is clear that the cross was not an afterthought on God's part when His original plan failed. It seems near blasphemy to even think such a thing.

Several misunderstandings make it seem at first glance as though the Lord Jesus was reluctant to go to the cross. On the occasion when some Greeks asked to see Jesus, He spoke of the necessity of a grain of wheat falling into the ground and giving its life before it could produce abundant fruit. The thought continues when Jesus says, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say, Father save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27). The translators of the King James version of the English Bible unfortunately placed the question mark in the wrong place. They put it after the words "what shall I say?" This makes it seem as if what the Lord should say was "Father save me from this hour," while the entire context is saying just the opposite. By putting the question mark after the phrase, "Father save me from this hour?" the passage is quite clear and follows the logic of the corn of wheat giving its life to bear fruit. In this passage the Lord also refers to the brazen serpent when He declared, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Isaiah may also have had the brazen serpent in mind when he wrote "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22).

It is true that in Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." The Son of God was in a human body and that human nature shrank from the suffering and death. Immediately, however, Jesus added, "nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt" (see Matt.26:39). It is conclusive, however, that Jesus expected to suffer and die to redeem humanity, for only a few minutes later, when the chief elders and armed multitude came to take Him and Peter took up his sword against the mob, Jesus reproved Peter and informed him that He could easily summon twelve legions of angels. Significantly, Jesus added, "But then how shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be" (Matt.26:53-54). So we know that Jesus willingly went to the cross as was determined and prophesied. He endured the cross and despised the shame (see Heb.12:2).

Since our Lord humbled Himself and became obedient unto

death, even the death of the cross (Phil.2:8), let us humble ourselves and become obedient to the death concerning the flesh and the world (Gal.5:23; 6:14), and let us do all things without murmurings (Phil.2:14). "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor.1:18). Hallelujah for the Cross!

NOTES:

THE MATTER OF BALAAM

Read: Numbers 22, 23, 24, 25, 31:1-20
 11 Peter 2:12-16; Jude vss.10-13
 Revelation 2:14

Memory Verse: While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. Hebrews 3:15

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The people of God have nothing to fear but sin.*
2. *It is a very dangerous thing when we know the will of God, not to do it.*
3. *Covetousness, as well as impurity or pride cannot coexist with the Spirit of God. We cannot serve God and mammon or lust or pride.*
4. *We must be aware of the wiles of Satan and not ignorant of his devices.*

I Israel Sets Forward: After the experience of the fiery vipers and the brazen serpent, the children of Israel pressed on toward Canaan. They encamped at Oboth, and Ije-abarim, then at the valley of Zared, and by the brooks of Arnon. Then they went on to Beer where the Lord miraculously provided water for Israel once again. This time the Lord showed Moses where to dig and the princes of Israel dug at his direction and found a well of abundant water.

From the well in the wilderness Israel marched on to Mattanah, and Nahaliel, and Bamoth, and finally to Pisgah. Sihon, king of the Amorites refused to allow Israel to pass and attacked them at Jabez. Israel thoroughly defeated the Amorites and their great king, and they took the land as their possession. At Bashan, another giant king came against them but this one, too, Og by name, was defeated and his land possessed.

So the children of Israel set forward again and pitched their camp in the plains of Moab. The king of Moab was Balak, who feared that he would share the same fate as Sihon and Og.

II Balak Summons Balaam: Balak conferred with the elders of the Midianites and apparently made an agreement with them to work together for the destruction of Israel. Elders representing both Moab and Midian were sent to Balaam, a famous sooth-sayer and diviner. They brought tokens of rewards that Balaam would receive if he would curse Israel. So successful had Balaam been in the past, that his reputation was widespread. Pethor the city of Balaam was located on the banks of the Euphrates river in Mesopotamia. So this was quite a trip for the messengers.

Balaam received the messengers and asked them to remain overnight while he inquired of the Lord, what he should do. God indeed came to Balaam that night and unequivocally forbade Balaam to go with the messengers or to curse the people, Israel. God revealed to Balaam that these people were blessed. In the morning Balaam told the messengers that the Lord would not give him permission to go.

King Balak took the refusal only as a holdout for greater rewards. He sent more honorable messengers with promises of great rewards. Despite the Lord's clear prohibition Balaam again asked the Lord if he could go. It is a dangerous thing, when God has made known His will, to keep on asking for our own way. Finally, the Lord said he might go if certain conditions were fulfilled. Balaam at once saddled his ass and set out, not waiting to see if the conditions would be met. The New Testament reveals that his motive was covetousness. He loved the wages of unrighteousness. The desire for money blinded him to the importance of doing the will of the Lord.

III The Madness of the Prophet: On the way Balaam's ass suddenly turned aside into a field. The Lord's anger was kindled against Balaam and the angel of the Lord with drawn sword stood in the way. So blind was Balaam by covetousness that he could not see the angel. The ass, however, saw the danger and turned aside for Balaam's safety and its own. Balaam beat the ass and went on again. The second time the angel stood against Balaam the ass turned aside into a wall and crushed Balaam's foot. This angered him again and he smote her. The third time the angel blocked the way in a narrow place, the ass fell down under Balaam. Now the covetous prophet was really mad. He beat the hapless animal with his staff. Then the ass spoke to Balaam in man's language rebuking him for his cruelty. Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel with drawn sword. When Balaam realized that the angel

had stood in the way to slay him, he was frightened and would have returned. Yet the angel bade him go on, but warned him only to speak words given him by the Lord.

IV Blessing Instead of Cursing: When he met Balak, king of Moab, Balaam explained that he could only speak what the Lord gave him. He could not and would not curse those whom God did not curse. So Balak took him to a high place (where Baal was worshipped) overlooking the encampment of Israel. Sacrifices were burned there and finally Balaam spoke. But instead of curses, there proceeded blessings from this strange prophet. He prophesied Israel's fruitfulness and hoped to die the death of the righteous like the end of Israel.

The king was angry and took Balaam to another location where the scene was reenacted. The second prophecy warned that God does not change His mind. The Lord did not see iniquity in Israel. "The shout of a king is among them," Balaam exclaimed. "There is no enchantment against Jacob...What hath God wrought!"

The third time the scene was repeated from another vantage point. The blessing of God was again pronounced instead of the curse which Balak had hoped for. He was angry and clapped his hands together in frustration. He warned Balaam that though he had intended him great honor, that now he had better flee. Balaam, however, gave another prophecy even more remarkable than the others. It was a prophecy of the Messiah. He mentioned the "Star out of Jacob" and "He that shall have dominion." He also gave several prophetic warnings of judgment for the surrounding nations before returning to his house.

V The Devilish Conspiracy: Unable to earn his reward through his prophesying, Balaam devised a wicked plot which he foresaw would bring judgment and the wrath of God on Israel. The story is not unfolded directly in the scripture but when all pieces are put together, we can be sure of the wicked involvement of this deceitful prophet. To earn his "wages of unrighteousness" Balaam conceived a plot whereby Israel would be led into sin. The narrative (Num.25) does not implicate Balaam when it tells of the sordid fornication of the men of Israel which they committed with the daughters of Moab. Nearby the encampment of Israel these daughters of Moab prepared a feast to Baal. The delicious aroma soon aroused the interest of the Israelites. Soon they were joined in the feast for the idol-god Baal with the predictable result, that immoral acts of whoredom

took place. One brazen Israelite brought a daughter of Moab into his tent in full view of Moses and the whole congregation.

God's judgment fell quickly on Israel, just as Balaam must have visioned. The judges of Israel were ordered by Moses to slay those involved in the idolatrous orgy. The heads of those who yielded to the evil seduction were hung up before the Lord till sundown to appease the anger of the Lord. Phinehas, the son of Eleazer, the high priest executed judgment on the brazen adulterer who took the Moabite into his tent in view of all Israel. He took a javelin and entering into the tent put a sudden end to their fornication by thrusting them both through with one thrust. God commended and blessed Phinehas for his zeal.

We might not have guessed that Balaam was the conspirator who caused this judgment in which 24,000 Israelites died, were it not for the mention of it in connection with the death of Balaam in Numbers 31. There we read of God's judgment against the Midianites. Twelve thousand troops (one thousand from each tribe) were sent under the leadership of Phinehas. Five kings of Midian were slain as well as all the men. Balaam also died in this retribution. When the victorious warriors returned with the women of Midian captives Moses rebuked them and reminded them that it was these women with those of Moab who "caused the children of Israel through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord" (see Num.31:16). The New Testament condemns Balaam, despite his beautiful prophecies, as the worst of men. We should learn the lesson of allowing no other master to rule our hearts than the Lord Jesus Himself. The love of money corrupted this gifted prophet. The same happens today. Lust and pride also can ruin the ministry of God's choice vessels if these evils are not quickly rooted out and utterly overcome. No man can serve two masters. Let us be sure that we choose to be faithful submissive servants to our good Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

EXHORTATION TO OBEDIENCE

Read: Deuteronomy 4:1-40 & 11:1-32

Memory Verse: For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. Hebrews 3:16

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *God is pleased when His people obey His commandments, and blesses them.*
2. *Warnings of punishment for disobedience are to be taken seriously.*
3. *We should be comfortable speaking of spiritual things to our children.*
4. *Obedience to the commands of Jesus promises great benefits; even greater than those offered to Israel for their obedience.*

I Deuteronomy: The name means the second law. It is a Greek word. Miriam and Aaron had died during this fortieth year since Exodus. Miriam died at Kadesh in the first month and Aaron was "gathered to his people" in the fifth month on Mount Hor. The Lord also spoke to Moses and told him that his time was at hand to be "gathered unto thy people." God told Moses to ascend Mount Abarim from whence he could view the promised land and then surrender his earthly life (Num.27:12-14). Although Moses was deeply disappointed not to be able to enter the land of promise, he bent his will to the will of his God and finished his course faithfully.

His first concern was for a successor. The Lord told Moses to take Joshua, the son of Nun, and to lay his hand upon him. Before Eleazer, the high priest, and in the sight of all Israel, Moses was to bestow a charge upon him. God told Moses to put some of his honor upon Joshua that the whole congregation would recognize him as Moses' successor and be obedient to him as they had been to Moses.

Knowing now that his time was short Moses began to set things in order. He arranged that those two and one half

tribes who desired to have their inheritance on the east side of Jordan as ideal grazing land for their cattle, should not settle down there until they had helped their brethren destroy the inhabitants of Canaan on the other side of Jordan. Moses gave instructions regarding the borders of the land and its division to the several tribes. On the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year, Moses gathered all Israel together and rehearsed for them the great deliverance God had wrought for them. He taught the people the law of God. Many of them were not yet born or were but children when God had spoken at Mount Sinai giving them the ten commandments. The book of Deuteronomy contains three major discourses. Moses directed them to the new young generation of Israelites, so they would not be ignorant of the laws of God nor of the great benefit obedience to those laws would bring. The first discourse is reported from Deut.1:1 to 4:40. The second which is the largest fills chapters 5-26 and the last is recorded in chapters 27-30.

Moses was still the great mediator. He desired God's best for Israel and he desired that God should be glorified and honored by the obedience of His people. In this rehearsal and amplification of the law for the new generation of Israelites Moses emphasizes the dangers of idolatry, which was their besetting sin before the captivity; and also the peril of self-glorification, which became their most glaring fault after the captivity.

The entire time of the book of Deuteronomy is not more than 37 days. So Moses wrote this book at the age of 120 years in the space of little more than a month. Surely his bodily vigor and mental energy were not the least impaired by his advanced age. The book is often attacked by skeptics, especially because of the remarkable prophecies it contains. These skeptics or "higher critics," as they are sometimes called, are unwilling to admit that such accurate prophecies, especially concerning the captivity could possibly be written before the actual occurrences. It is noteworthy that Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy three times in overcoming the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Both Peter and Paul quote from Deuteronomy also. It is a book worthy of our careful study.

II The Value of Obedience: Moses rehearsed for the young Israelites the wonders of God's dealings with Israel in the wilderness. He urged them to prepare themselves to go into the promised land and possess it fully. In order that they might be successful in their endeavor, Moses urged Israel to listen care-

fully to the laws he would teach them. He reminded them of what had happened when Israel was joined to Baal-peor (Num. 25:2). They themselves, though many of them were not at the Red Sea or Mount Sinai, had witnessed the awesome power of God which was manifested against those who joined the worship of Baal at Peor and who committed fornication (Deut.4:3).

Israel was reminded to keep all the statutes and judgments which Moses had taught them so that the nations about them would recognize that Israel was a great and wise nation. No other nation had God so near to them (vs.7) or a code of laws so fair and so wise (vs.8). But it was important not only for Israel to obey the law themselves at this time, but it was absolutely imperative that they pass on the law to their children and grandchildren (vs.9). Israel was admonished to teach the word of the Lord to their children by speaking of them in the home (ch.11:19). How important for us today also, to speak in the home to our children of spiritual things and about the word of God. Often a parent finds it difficult to discuss the things of God with members of their own family because those loved ones know too well the real character of their lives. Let us be sure that we live uprightly all the time so that we need not be embarrassed to speak of the things of God to our loved ones.

The Jewish people often follow the instructions of Deut. 11:18-20 very literally. They actually wear a copy of the ten commandments in the center of the forehead and on a bracelet on their hands. You will often find a tiny miniature copy of the ten commandments on the doorposts of a Jewish home. Yet certainly this is not what the Lord intended by these instructions. What Moses intended to teach by these inspired instructions was that the law of the Lord should always be kept in view, and that all we do should be governed by the word of the Lord. Our homes as well as the house of the Lord should be governed by the word of the Lord. We must be sure to catch the spirit of God's teaching so that we obey with our whole hearts and not just with outward meaningless ritual.

Like a father promises to his children certain treats and special gifts if they obey his rules, so the Lord God made promises to Israel if they would obey His commandments carefully. He promised to make them strong to go in and possess the land if they would keep all His commandments. He also promised to send the rain, both the early and latter rain so they would have abundant harvests if Israel would diligently hearken to His commandments. Israel was promised length of days in the

land for their obedience. If Israel would show its love for God by walking in His ways and sticking to Jehovah alone, the Lord promised to drive the nations out that inhabited the promised land. Finally, God promised a blessing "if ye obey." There were also warnings for disobedience especially for idolatry.

Recently our country has suffered in many areas from lack of rain. Not many people consider the possibility that our materialistic idolatry, our decline or collapse of morals, our blood-guiltiness for millions of abortions may contribute to these natural disasters that afflict our land. How good it would be for the nation to mourn for its sins and repent and turn back to the Lord. If not even a sparrow falls on the ground without the knowledge of our Heavenly Father, it is not very likely that our nation will go on prospering and blessed if we forsake His laws.

To us as individuals, also, great promises are given for our obedience to the commands of Jesus. Our Lord has promised to manifest Himself to us if we show our love for Him by keeping His commandments. "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). This is our promised land. Let us show our love by our obedience. Jesus not only teaches obedience, but He exemplifies it. He did always those things that pleased the Father and became obedient even unto the death of the cross. Let us follow His example and prove our love by our willing obedience.

NOTES:

BLESSINGS OR CURSES

Read: Deuteronomy 27, 28, 29, & 30

Memory Verse: But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? Hebrews 3:17

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *We have the responsibility to choose between obedience and disobedience.*
2. *By promises or threats God seeks to motivate His people to obedience.*
3. *The history of Israel verifies the truth of the blessings and curses set forth in this passage.*
4. *The New Testament also promises blessing for obedience and warns of disaster for disobedience. We have the Holy Spirit to empower us to obedience and the imputed righteousness of Jesus for our portion by faith.*

I Keep All the Commandments: Before Moses was taken from the children of Israel he gathered them all together and gave to them the law of God. At Sinai the law was given to Israel in an awesome display of the power of God. This "second law" was given about 39 years later to the new generation of Israelites. Some of them had witnessed the original law-giving when they were children. Their parents had asked Moses to request of God that He speak to them directly, in such an awesome manner, no more. Moses became the mediator through whom God gave His law to the people.

God had written, the original ten commandments with His own finger. But now, through Moses, the Lord instructed the new generation of Israelites, that as soon as they crossed over Jordan into the promised land they should set up a memorial of great stones, plastered, and write thereon "all the words of this law very plainly" (Deut.27:8). Each generation needs its own revelation of the law of the Lord. It is imperative today that the new converts learn the law of the Lord. The new testa-

ment does not do away with God's law, but enables us to fulfill it by the power of the Spirit and the resurrection life of Christ manifested in us by faith. It has proven to be a most profitable practice for young Christians to write out in longhand the commandments of Jesus.

II Gerizim and Ebal: Moses divided the tribes of Israel into two groups. The people of the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and Benjamin were to assemble on Mount Gerizim when Israel crossed over Jordan and entered the promised land. The people of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali were to gather on Mount Ebal. There, on the slopes of these two adjacent mountains the Levites were instructed to read with a loud voice the promises and warnings of this "second law" (Deuteronomy). When the promises of blessing were read for obedience, the six tribes on Mount Gerizim were to respond, "Amen." In like manner when the curses were articulated by the Levites, with a loud voice, then those six tribes on Mount Ebal were to respond with a loud Amen (Deut.27:11-14).

Centuries later when Ezra and the remnant of Israel returned from 70 years of captivity to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, they would not allow the Samaritans of mixed blood to join them in the great work. The Samaritans then built their own temple on the summit of the Mount of blessing, Mount Gerizim. The Maccabees destroyed the building in the years between the Old and New Testaments, but the Samaritans continued to worship in the open on Mount Gerizim. Jacob's well was near the lower slopes and there Jesus met the Samaritan woman. When she said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," it was to this Mount Gerizim that she referred.

III Life and Death; Blessing and Cursing: It is the Lord's great desire to bless His people. Yet it must be remembered that our Lord is righteous and just. Therefore, He not only rewards the obedience of His people, but also must punish the rebellion. The Lord has made gracious provision for the forgiveness of sin: the animal sacrifices for Israel in their days, and the blood of Christ for us in these days.

This "second law" which the Levites were to read threatened curses for idolatry (vs.15), for not honoring father and mother (vs.16), for unkindness (vss.17-19), for immorality (vss.20-23), and for intentional injury and murder (vss.24-25). Finally the law concludes with the warning quoted by St. Paul in Gal.3:10:

"Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (vs.26). At each warning all the people were admonished to respond, "Amen."

The short passage in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 describes the blessings God would bestow if and when His people hearkened diligently to His voice and observed to keep all His commandments (ch.28:1). God offered to make their nation "high above all nations of the earth." The blessings offered included blessings in the city or country; fruitfulness in children and cattle; plenteous harvests; protection in their travels; victory over their enemies; rain for their crops. The Lord promised to keep them on top always if they would obey His commandments.

The warnings and curses with which God threatened Israel are far more extensive than the blessings. The foreknowledge of God recognized the course Israel would ultimately take and recorded these warnings accordingly. Plagues of sickness were threatened. Drought and starvation, defeat by enemies, captivity and premature death were held before them as a motivation to obedience. Very notable in the long passage of curses (ch.28:15-68) is the recurrence of the warning; "till thou be destroyed," or "until thou perish" (see vss. 20, 21, 22, 24, 45, 48, 51, 61, 63, & 64). It is an accurate description of what happened to the Jewish people after they rejected the Lord as their Messiah.

Not only were the blessings and curses to cover the nation of Israel in general, but they also applied to the separate families and even to the individual (see ch.29:18-20). The offer was also set before Israel that should all this evil come upon them because of their disobedience, they might even in the land of their captivity repent and return to the Lord with all their heart. Then the Lord would turn their captivity and restore them to their land (ch.30:1-3).

IV Fulfillment: These promises of blessing and threats of curses were not idle rhetoric. The history of Israel records such minute fulfillment of these threats in particular that skeptics have concluded that Deuteronomy could not have been written before the captivity which is described so accurately there. Whenever Israel sought the Lord sincerely with all their hearts, the Lord sent blessing. David's obedience and love for the law of the Lord resulted in an era of prosperity and enlargement. Jehoshaphat began his reign by teaching the law of God through all the land and victory over their enemies and abundance resulted. Hezekiah also turned Israel back to God after his father Ahaz had forsaken the Lord to the detriment of

all Judah. How quick the Lord is to reward repentance. But if the promised blessings became reality under the blessed leadership of godly leaders, so the curses fell with a vengeance on Israel when they forsook the Lord. The ten northern tribes were the leaders in apostasy. Idolatry and Baal-worship were prevalent there in the days of Ahab. Just as God had warned, the drought came and $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of famine resulted until Elijah called Israel back to God. The very horrible warning of such famine that women would eat their own children came to pass exactly as described in Deuteronomy (ch.28:53,57) in the days of Elisha. A woman of Samaria complained to the king that after agreeing with another woman to give her baby son to be eaten today and the other woman's baby would be eaten the next day, that the other woman had hidden her son.

The ten northern tribes led in all disobedience from the days of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. They were first to be conquered and led into captivity. As Judah was not far behind them in sin and apostasy, so they were not far behind in judgment. They, too, went into captivity in Babylon for 70 years as a direct result of disobeying the word of the Lord.

V For Our Learning: Let us not cast off this serious lesson as an irrelevant story belonging to a bygone dispensation. The Lord Jesus warned that whoever heard His sayings and did not do them would be like one who built a house on sand. As surely as such a house falls in the great storm so the spiritual house of those who disregard God's call to obedience will collapse and cause eternal loss. Let us also remember that the greatest promises of the Gospels are offered to those who show their real love for God and the Savior by real works of obedience (see John 14:21-23). Let us beware of false security in the guise of pernicious teaching on the grace of God which makes obedience unnecessary.

THE LAST ACTS OF MOSES

Read: Deuteronomy 31, 32, 33, & 34
 Hebrews 3:1-6; 11:23-29

Memory Verse: Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Hebrews 4:1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Reading and studying God's law both in the Old and New Testaments, is of great importance for believers.*
2. *We learn unconsciously from the songs we sing.*
3. *God provides new leadership when His faithful workers pass on to their reward.*
4. *The legacy of the righteous enriches their followers.*
5. *If we live a God centered life our Lord will not forsake us in the hour of death.*

I The Writing of Deuteronomy: As Moses reached his 120th year (Deut.31:1), he realized that his time was short. The entire book of Deuteronomy is a product of Moses' realization that he must soon pass from the scene. He willed to Israel, no great sums of accumulated wealth to be used for a memorial to perpetuate his memory, but a "second edition" of the law of God to be read throughout all of Israel's generations. He wrote this book in the space of about 30 days. He delivered the written book to the priests and commanded them to place it in the safety of the "side of the ark." He commanded, further, that every seven years at the feast of tabernacles when all Israel was gathered together, that it should be read in their hearing. Men, women and children, with any strangers that were among them, were all to "hear and...learn, and fear the Lord, and observe to do all the words of this law" (ch.31:12).

Moses spoke all the words of this "second law" to Israel,

and while they were gathered together for the last portion, he charged Israel to "be strong and of a good courage." He promised that as Joshua led them over Jordan, the Lord God would go with them to overthrow the evil inhabitants of Canaan and give Israel possession of the land. God also gave a charge to Joshua through Moses: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee" (ch.31:23).

II The Song of Moses: Moses was instructed by the Lord to write a song for the children of Israel to learn and sing which would remind them of their duty of obedience, and call to remembrance their deliverance from bondage. The words, of course, since they are recorded in the holy scriptures, are given by inspiration (Deut.32:1-43). It was a teaching song. As the children of Israel learned it and sang it, they could hardly help from imbibing the fear of the Lord. This song or psalm is a great poetic work aside from its inspiration. The alternate themes of blessings and threats are almost unparalleled in literature.

What we learn to sing can be either a blessing and a help to our spiritual lives, or a snare and curse. What we sing becomes a part of us. In Africa, today, Christian doctrine is being taught to the most illiterate peoples by the use of "teaching songs." An angry Pope, in the days of Martin Luther complained that "the whole German people are singing themselves into the doctrine of Luther." The truths of the reformation were couched in the beautiful songs which Luther and others composed. Those incapable of understanding the great reformer's theology learned it easily and unconsciously through his songs. How blessed for little children to learn as their first song, "Jesus loves me, this I know." Such a simple yet profound truth can stay with them for a lifetime.

On the other hand the "hit" songs of our modern culture are full of allusions to lust and drunkenness. Certainly, these worldly songs are used by Satan to influence young people to experiment in the perilous ways of sin. Let us be thankful for our heritage of Psalms, hymns, and gospel songs. We may sing the praises of God and be inspired and edified by using the blessed songs which God has given us.

After Moses, with Joshua's help, had taught the congregation the song, he emphasized its importance with such a plea that applies really to us and the whole Word of God. "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the

the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days" (ch.32:46-47). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews warns us in the Gospel era to give even more earnest heed to the things which we have heard (Heb.2:1). Our oracle is the Son of God Himself whereas this "second law" was given through Moses the mediator.

III Blessing the Tribes: After teaching the song to the people, Moses was called by the Lord to climb Mount Abarim to Mount Nebo where he must surrender his life up to the Lord because of the transgression at Meribah. Moses' farewell to the people took the form of a blessing for each of the twelve tribes. One by one the tribes are named. An appropriate blessing is give to each. No reason for the order of the tribes is apparent. Reuben, the firstborn is mentioned first, but obtained the briefest blessing. Levi and Joseph receive the longest of the benedictions. Levi was, of course, the tribe of Moses. Joseph received the birthright at least from the standpoint of a double inheritance in Canaan. Joseph became two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. Note the reason for Joseph's extensive blessing, he "was separated from his brethren" (ch.33:16). After the individual blessings to the tribes, Moses raises one last outburst of praise to the Lord and blessing for all Israel: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." The last words of the great law-giver are worthy consideration (see Deut.33:26-29).

Personal Note: I have received great help and blessing in my life and for my family and ministry through the prayers and blessings of God's faithful old servants. On more than one occasion, after requesting prayer from great old saints which I have had the good fortune to meet, the windows of heaven were opened and unspeakable blessing and help was given. We should be alert to ask for and receive all the help possible from God's faithful vessels.

IV The Triumphant Funeral: Moses went up Mount Nebo (part of Abarim) and then to neighboring Mount Pisgah. From this lofty peak God showed Moses the beautiful land he was forbidden to enter. His eye was not dim despite his advanced age of 120 years. He viewed the land to the north, and to the west to the Mediterranean Sea, and to the south from Jericho to Zoar. After this we read, "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord." Jewish

scholars understand this to be "by the kiss of the Lord." What a beautiful thought. With no one present to bury the body of His faithful servant, God undertook to do it Himself. The place is simply recorded as "a valley in the land of Moab." What a funeral that must have been. Someone has said that if you have God for your undertaker, you are in good shape. We read in the New Testament that Satan fought with an angel for the body of Moses. The outcome of that contest is perhaps suggested in the appearance of Moses with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. There, in a sense, Moses finally did enter the promised land but by then he had found the heavenly land to be far more desirable and he quickly returned thence.

V Faithful in All His House: The New Testament bears witness to the greatness of this spiritual giant. His gift for recording the history of humanity by inspired knowledge is the greatest of all Bible authors. His quality of meekness is well known. Although not a patient man to begin with, the quality of this grace in his later years is remarkable. He was like our Lord in so many ways that he could say by the Spirit, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me." Abraham proved his faith by his obedience, going out not knowing where he would go. But Moses showed his faith by going out (of Egypt) knowing full well where he was going (the wilderness) and with whom he was going (2 million Jewish slaves). That obedience took immense faith (see Heb.11:23-29).

How wonderful it is that when God's great servants die, the work of God goes on. Joshua was much inferior to Moses. He could never have done what Moses did. Yet he finished what Moses could not. Our God marches on. How great our gifts and callings are is not as important as how faithfully we do what is asked of us no matter how small. Let us then be true and faithful, as Moses was in all his house.

Note: The poem included compares the funeral of Moses (vss.3 & 4) to that of a great warrior (vs.1) and to a great poet (vs.2).

THE DEATH OF MOSES

"When the warrior dieth,
 His comrades in the war,
 With arms reversed, and muffled drum,
 Follow the funeral car.
 They show the banners taken,
 They tell his battles won,
 And after him lead the masterless steed,
 While peals the minute-gun.

"Amid the noblest of the land,
 Men lay the sage to rest;
 And give the bard an honored place,
 With costly marble drest,
 In the great minster transept,
 Where lights like glories fall,
 And sweet choir sings, and the organ rings,
 Along the emblazoned wall.

"This was the bravest warrior
 That ever buckled sword;
 This the most gifted poet
 That ever breathed a word;
 And never earth's philosopher
 Traced, with his golden pen,
 On the deathless page truth half so sage,
 As he wrote down for men.

"And had HE not high honor?
 The hill-side for his pall,
 To lie in state while angels wait,
 With stars for tapers tall;
 And the dark rock-pines, like tossing plumes,
 Over his bier to wave;
 And God's own hand, in that lonely land,
 To lay him in the grave."

--Mrs. Alexander