

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

"Things new and old."

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by

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Numbers 6

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord: he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his GOD is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord" (Verse 1-8).

The ordinance of Nazariteship is full of interest and practical instruction. In it we see the case of one setting himself apart, in a very special manner, from things which, though not absolutely sinful in themselves, were, nevertheless, calculated to interfere with that intense consecration of heart which is set forth in true Nazariteship.

In the first place, the Nazarite was not to drink wine.

The fruit of the vine, in every shape and form, was to him a forbidden thing. Now, wine, as we

know, is the apt symbol of earthly joy - the expression of that social enjoyment which the human heart is so fully capable of entering into. From this the Nazarite in the wilderness was sedulously to keep himself. With him it was a literal thing. He was not to excite nature by the use of strong drink. All the days of his separation he was called to exercise the strictest abstinence from wine.

Such was the type, and it is written for our learning - written too, in this marvellous book of Numbers, so rich in its wilderness lessons. This is only what we might expect. The impressive institution of the Nazarite finds its appropriate place in the book of Numbers. It is in perfect keeping with the character of the book, which, as has been already remarked, contains all that specially belongs to life in the wilderness.

Let us then inquire into the nature of the lesson taught us in the Nazarite's abstinence from everything pertaining to the vine, from the kernel even to the husk.

There has been but one true and perfect Nazarite in this World - but one who maintained, from first to last, the most complete separation from all mere earthly joy. From the moment He entered upon His public work, He kept Himself apart from all that was of this world. His heart was fixed upon GOD and His work, With a devotion that nothing could shake. No claims of earth or nature were ever allowed, for a single moment, to come in between His heart and that work which He came to do. **"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"** And again, **"What have I to do with thee?"** With such words did the true Nazarite seek to adjust the claims of nature. He had one thing to do, and to that He separated Himself perfectly. His eye was single and His heart undivided. This is apparent from first to last. He could say to His disciples, **"I have meat to eat that ye know not of;"** and when they, not knowing the deep significance of His Words, said, **"Hath any man brought Him anything to eat?"** He replied, **"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"** (John 4). So also, at the close of His course here below, we hear Him giving utterance to such words as these, as He took into His hand the paschal cup: **"Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come"** (Luke 22:17, 18).

Thus we see how the perfect Nazarite carried himself throughout. He could have no joy in the earth, no joy in the nation of Israel. The time had not come for that, and therefore He detached Himself from all that which mere human affection might find in association with His own, in order to devote Himself to the one grand object which was ever before His mind. The time will come when He, as the Messiah, will rejoice in His people and in the earth; But, until that blissful moment arrives, He is apart as the true Nazarite, and His people are united with Him. **"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world, and for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth"** (John 17:16-19).

Christian reader, let us deeply ponder this first grand feature of the Nazarite character. It is important we should faithfully examine ourselves in the light of it. It is a very grave question indeed how far we, as Christians, are really entering into the meaning and power of this intense separation from all the excitement of nature, and from all merely earthly joy. It may perhaps be said, "What harm is there in having a little amusement or recreation? Surely we are not called to be monks. Has not GOD given as richly all things to enjoy? And while we are in the world, is it

not right we should enjoy it?"

To all this we reply, It is not a question of the harm of this, that, or the other. There was no harm, as a general rule, in and, nothing abstractedly wrong in the vine tree. But the point is this, if any one aimed a being a Nazarite, if he aspired to this holy separation unto the Lord, then was he to abstain wholly from the use of wine and strong drink. Others might drink wine; but the Nazarite was not to touch it.

Now, the question for us is this, Do we aim at being Nazarites? Do we sigh after thorough separation and devotion of ourselves, in body, soul, and spirit, unto GOD? If so, we must be apart from all these things in which mere nature finds its enjoyment. It is upon this one hinge that the whole question turns. The question, most assuredly, is not "Are we to be monks?" but "Do we want to be Nazarites?"

Is it, our heart's desire to be apart, with our Lord CHRIST, from all mere earthly joy - to be separated unto GOD from those things which, though not absolutely sinful in themselves, do, nevertheless, tend to hinder that entire consecration of heart which is the true secret of all spiritual Nazariteship? Is not the Christian reader aware that there are, in very deed, many such things? Is he not conscious that there are numberless things which exert a distracting and weakening influence upon his spirit, and yet were they to be tried by the standard of ordinary morality, they might be allowed to pass as harmless?

But we must remember that GOD's Nazarites do not measure things by any such standard. Theirs is not an ordinary morality at all. They look at things from a divine and heavenly standpoint, and hence they cannot suffer anything to pass as harmless which tends, in any wise, to interfere with that high tone of consecration to GOD after which their souls are fervently breathing.

May we have grace to weigh these things, and to watch against every defiling influence. Each one must be aware of what it is which, in his case, would prove to be wine and strong drink. It may seem to be a trifle; but we may rest assured that nothing is a trifle which breaks the current of our soul's communion with GOD, and robs us of that holy intimacy which it is our privilege ever to enjoy.

But there was another thing which marked the Nazarite. He was not to shave his head.

"All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow."

In I Corinthians 11:14, we learn that it argues a lack of dignity for a man to have long hair.

"Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him"

From this we learn that if we really desire to live a life of separation to GOD, we must be prepared to surrender our dignity in nature. This our Lord JESUS CHRIST did perfectly. He made Himself of no reputation. He surrendered His rights in everything. He could say, **"I am a worm and no man."** He emptied Himself thoroughly, and took the very lowest place. He neglected Himself, while He cared for others. In a word, His Nazariteship was perfect in this as in all beside.

Now here is just the very thing which we so little like to do. We naturally stand up for our dignity and seek to maintain our rights. It is deemed manly so to do. But the perfect Man never did so; and if we aim at being Nazarites we shall not do so either. We must surrender the dignities of nature, and forego the joys of earth, if we would tread a path of thorough separation to GOD in this world. By and by both will be in place; but not now.

Here again, be it remarked, the question it is not as to the right or wrong of the case. As a general rule, it was right for a man to shave his locks; but it was not right, nay it was altogether wrong, for a Nazarite to do so. This made all the difference. It was quite right for an ordinary man to shave and drink wine; but the Nazarite was not an ordinary man; he was one set apart from all that was ordinary to tread a path peculiar to himself; and to use a razor or taste wine would involve the entire surrender of that peculiar path. Hence, if any inquire, "Is it not right to enjoy the pleasures of earth, and maintain the dignities of nature? Quite right, if we are to walk as men but wholly wrong, yea, absolutely fatal, if we want to walk as Nazarites."

This simplifies the matter amazingly. It answers a thousand questions and solves a thousand difficulties. It is of little use to split hairs about the harm of this or that particular thing. The question is, What is our real purpose and object? Do we merely want to get on as men, or do we long to live as true Nazarites? According to the language of I Corinthians 3:3, to "**Walk as men**" and to be "**carnal**" are synonymous.

Does such language really govern us? Do we drink into the spirit and breathe the atmosphere of such a Scripture? Or are we ruled by the spirit and principles of a godless, Christless world? It is useless to spend our time arguing points which would never be raised at all if our souls were in the right temper and attitude. No doubt, it is perfectly right, perfectly natural, perfectly consistent, for the men of this world to enjoy all that it has to offer them, and to maintain their rights and their dignities to the very utmost of their power. It were childish to question this. But, on the other hand, what is right, and natural, and consistent for the men of this world, is wrong, unnatural, and inconsistent for GOD's Nazarites.

Thus the matter stands, if we are to be governed by the simple truth of GOD. we learn from Numbers 6, that if a Nazarite drank wine or shaved his locks, he defiled the head of his consecration. Has this no voice, no lesson for us? assuredly it has. It teaches us that if our souls desire to pursue a path of whole-hearted consecration to GOD, we must abstain from the joys of earth, and surrender the dignities and the rights of nature. It must be thus, seeing that GOD and the world, flesh and spirit, do not and cannot coalesce. The time will come when it will be otherwise; but, just now, all who will live to GOD, and walk in the Spirit, must live apart from the world, and mortify the flesh. May GOD, of His great mercy, enable us so to do!

One other feature of the Nazarite remains to be noticed. He was not to touch a dead body.

"All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die; because the consecration of his God is upon his head."

Thus we see that whether it was drinking wine, shaving his locks, or touching a dead body, the

effect was the same; any one of the three involved the defilement of the head of the Nazarite's consecration. Wherefore it is plain that it was as defiling to the Nazarite to drink wine or to shave his Head, as it was to touch a dead body. It is well to see this. We are prone to make distinctions which will not stand for a moment in the light of the divine presence. When once the consecration of GOD rested upon the head of any one, that great and important fact became the standard and touchstone of all morality. It placed the individual on entirely new and peculiar ground, and rendered it imperative upon him to look at everything from a new and peculiar point of view. He was no longer to ask what became him as a man; but what became him as a Nazarite. Hence, if his dearest friend lay dead by his side he was not to touch him. He was called to keep himself apart from the defiling influence of death, and all because "**the consecration of God**" was upon his head.

Now, in this entire subject of Nazariteship, it is needful for the reader to understand, very distinctly, that it is not, by any means, a question of the soul's salvation, of eternal life, or of the believer's perfect security in CHRIST. If this be not clearly seen it may lead the mind into perplexity and darkness. There are, two grand links in Christianity which, though very intimately connected, are perfectly distinct, namely, the link of eternal life, and the link of personal communion. The former can never be snapped by anything; the latter can be snapped in a moment, by the weight of a feather. It is to the second of these that the doctrine of Nazariteship pertains.

We behold, in the person of the Nazarite, a type of one who sets out in some special path of devotedness or consecration to CHRIST.

The power of continuance in this path consists in secret communion with GOD; so that if the communion be interrupted, the power is gone. This renders the subject peculiarly solemn. There is the greatest possible danger of attempting to pursue the path in the absence of that which constitutes the source of his power. This is most disastrous, and demands the utmost vigilance. we have briefly glanced at the various things which tend to interrupt the Nazarite's communion; but it would be wholly impossible, by any words of ours, to set forth the moral effect of any attempt to keep up the appearance or Nazariteship when the inward reality is gone. It is dangerous in the extreme. It is infinitely better to confess our failure, and take our true place, than to keep up a false appearance. GOD will have reality; and we may rest assured that, sooner or later, our weakness and folly will be made manifest to all. It is very deplorable and very humbling when "the Nazarites that were purer than snow," become "blacker than a coal;" but it is far worse when those who have become Thus black, keep up the pretence of being white.

Let us look at the solemn case of Samson, as set before us in the sixteenth chapter of Judges. He, in an evil hour, betrayed his secret and lost his power - lost it though he knew it not. But the enemy soon knew it. It was soon made manifest to all that the Nazarite had defiled the head of his consecration.

"And it came to pass, when she [Delilah] pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; that he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto GOD from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (Verses 16, 17).

Here alas! was the betrayal of the deep and holy secret of all his power. Up to this, his path had been one of strength and victory, simply because it had been one of holy Nazariteship. But the lap of Delilah proved too much for the heart of Samson, and what a thousand Philistines could not do was done by the ensnaring influence of a single woman. Samson fell from the lofty elevation of the Nazarite down to the level of an ordinary man.

"And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; (Alas! alas! a fatal sleep to GOD's Nazarite!) and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house" (Judges 16:18-21).

Oh! reader, what a picture! How solemn! How admonitory! What a melancholy spectacle was Samson, going out to shake himself, **"as at other times!"** Alas! the **"as"** was out of place. He might shake himself, But it was no longer **"as at other times,"** for the power was gone; the Lord was departed from him; and the once powerful Nazarite became a blind prisoner; and instead of triumphing over the Philistines, he had to grind in their prison house. So much for yielding to mere nature. Samson never regained his liberty. He Was permitted, through the mercy of GOD, to gain one more victory over the uncircumcised; but that victory cost him his life. GOD's Nazarites must keep themselves pure or lose their power. In their case, power and purity are inseparable. They cannot get on without inward holiness; and hence the urgent need of being ever on the watch against the various things which tend to draw away the heart, distract the mind, and lower the tone of spirituality. Let us ever keep before our souls those words of our chapter, **"all the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord."** Holiness is the grand and indispensable characteristic of all the days of Nazariteship; so that when once holiness is forfeited, Nazariteship is at an end.

What then, it may be asked, is to be done? The Scripture before us supplies the answer.

"And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; and the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day. And he shall consecrate unto the Lord the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering; but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled" (Numbers 6:9-12).

Here we find atonement, in its two grand aspects, as the only ground on which the Nazarite could be restored to communion. He had contracted defilement, and that defilement could only

be removed by the blood of the sacrifice. We might deem it a very trying matter to touch a dead body, and particularly under such circumstances. It might be said, "How could he help, touching it when the man had suddenly dropped dead by his side?" To all this the reply is at once simple and solemn. GOD's Nazarites must maintain personal purity; and, moreover, the standard by which their purity is to be regulated is not human but divine. The mere touch of death was sufficient to break the link of communion; and had the Nazarite presumed to go on as though nothing had happened, he would have been flying in the face of GOD's commandments, and bringing down heavy judgment upon himself.

But, blessed be GOD, grace had made provision.

- there was the burnt offering - the type of the death of CHRIST to Godward.
- there was the sin offering - the type of that same death to usward. And
- there was the trespass offering - the type of the death of CHRIST, not only in its application to the root or principle of sin in the nature, but also to the actual sin committed.

In a word, it needed the full virtue of the death of CHRIST to remove the defilement caused by the simple touch of a dead body. This is peculiarly solemnizing. Sin is a dreadful thing in GOD's sight - most dreadful. A single sinful thought, a sinful look, a sinful word is enough to bring a dark, heavy cloud over the soul, which will hide from our view the light of GOD's countenance, and plunge us into deep distress and misery.

Let us, then, beware how we trifle with sin. Let us remember that ere one stain of the guilt of sin even the very smallest could be removed, the blessed Lord JESUS CHRIST had to pass through all the unutterable horrors of Calvary. That intensely bitter cry, "**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" is the only thing that can give us any proper idea of what sin is; and into the profound depths of that cry no mortal or angel can ever enter.

But though we can never fathom the mysterious depths of the sufferings of CHRIST, we should at least seek to meditate more habitually upon His Cross and passion, and, in this way, reach a much deeper view of the awfulness of sin, in the sight of GOD. If, indeed, sin was so dreadful, so abhorrent to a holy GOD, that He was constrained to turn away the light of His countenance from that blessed One who had dwelt in His bosom from all eternity; if He had to forsake Him because He was bearing sin in His own body on the tree, then what must sin be?

Oh! reader, let us seriously consider these things. May they ever have a place deep down in these hearts or ours that are so easily betrayed into sin! How lightly, at times, do we think of that which cost the Lord JESUS everything, not only life, but that which is better and dearer than life, even the light of GOD's countenance! May we have a far deeper sense of the hatefulness of sin! May we, most sedulously, watch against the bare movement of the eye in a wrong direction, for we may rest assured that the heart will follow the eye, and the feet will follow the heart, and thus we get away from the Lord, lose the sense of His presence and His love, and become miserable, or, if not miserable, what is far worse, dead, cold, and callous - "**hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**"

May GOD, in His infinite mercy, keep us from falling! May we have grace to watch, more jealously, against everything, no matter what, that might defile the head of our consecration! it is

a serious: thing to get out of communion; and a most perilous thing to attempt to go on in the Lord's service with a defiled conscience. True it is that grace pardons and restores, but we never regain what we have lost. This latter is set forth, with solemn emphasis, in the passage of Scripture before us:

"He shall consecrate unto the Lord the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering; but the days that were before shall be lost (or shall fall, as the margin reads it), because his separation was defiled."

This is a point, in our subject, full of instruction and admonition for our souls. When the Nazarite became defiled, by any means, even by the touch of a dead body, he had to begin over again. It was not merely the days of his defilement that were lost, or let fall, but actually all the days of his previous Nazariteship. All went for nothing, and this simply by reason of touching a dead body.

What does this teach us? It teaches this, at least, that when we diverge, the breadth of a hair, from the narrow path of communion, and get away from the Lord, we must return to the very point from which we set out, and begin *de novo*. We have many examples of this in Scripture; and it would be our wisdom to consider them, and also to weigh the great practical truth which they illustrate.

Take the case of Abraham, in his descent into Egypt, as recorded in Genesis 12. This was, very evidently, a divergence from his proper path. And what was the consequence? The days were lost or let fall, and he had to set back to the point whence he had swerved, and begin over again. Thus, in Genesis 12:8, we read, **"And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord."** Then, after his return out of the land of Egypt, we read, **"He went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord"** (Genesis 13:3, 4).

All the time spent in Egypt went for nothing. There was no altar there, no worship, no communion; and Abraham had to get back to the self-same point from which he had diverged, and begin on the new.

Thus it is in every case; and this will account for the miserably slow progress which some of us make in our practical career. We fail, turn aside, get away from the Lord, are plunged in spiritual darkness; and then His voice of love reaches us in restoring power, and brings us back to the point from which we had wandered; our souls are restored, but we have lost time and suffered incalculably. This is most serious, and it should lead us to walk with holy vigilance and circumspection, so that we may not have to double back upon our path, and lose what can never be regained.

True it is that our wanderings, and our stumblings, and our failings give us an insight into our own hearts, teach us to distrust ourselves, and illustrate the boundless and unchangeable grace of our GOD. All this is quite true; but still there is a very much higher way of learning both

ourselves and GOD, than by wandering, stumbling, or failing. Self, in all the terrible depths of that word, should be judged in the holy light of the divine presence; and there, too, our souls should grow in the knowledge of GOD as He unfolds Himself, by the Holy Ghost, in the face of JESUS CHRIST, and in the precious pages of Holy Scripture.

This surely is the more excellent way of learning both ourselves and GOD; and this, too, is the power of all true Nazarite separation. The soul that habitually lives in the sanctuary of GOD, or, in other words, that walks in unbroken communion with GOD, is the one who will have a just sense of what nature is, in all its phases, though it be not learnt by sad experience. And not only so; but he will have a deeper and more just sense of what GOD is, in Himself, and to all who put their trust in Him. It is poor work to be learning self by experience. We may depend upon it, the true way to learn it is in communion; and when we learn it thus, we shall not be characterized by perpetually dwelling upon our personal vileness, but rather we shall be occupied with that which is outside and above self altogether, even the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS our Lord.

We shall, in closing this section, quote, at length, for the reader, the statement of:

"The law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; and he shall offer his offering unto the Lord, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings; and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring them before the Lord, and shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven; and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and the heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the Lord for his separation, beside that that his hand shall get: according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation" (Numbers 6:13-21).

This marvellous "**law**" leads us onward to something future, when the full result of CHRIST's perfect work shall appear; and when He, as the Messiah of Israel, shall, at the close of his Nazarite separation, taste true joy in His beloved people, and in this earth. The time will then have come for the Nazarite to drink wine. From all this He set Himself apart, for the accomplishment of that great work, so fully set forth, in all its aspects and in all its bearings, in the foregoing "**law**." He is apart from the nation, and apart from this world, in the power of true Nazariteship, as He said to His disciples on that memorable night, "**I will not drink henceforth (*ap arti*) of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom**" (Matthew 26:29).

But there is a bright day coming, when the Lord Messiah shall rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in His people. The prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, are full of the most glowing and soul-stirring allusions to that bright and blissful day. To quote the passages would literally fill a volume. But if the reader will turn to the closing section of Isaiah's prophecy, he will find a sample of that to which we refer; and he will find many similar passages throughout the various books of the prophets.

We must not attempt to quote; but we would warn the reader against the danger of being led astray by the uninspired headings attached to those magnificent passages which refer to Israel's future, such, for example, as "*The blessings of the Gospel*" - "*The enlargement of the Church.*" These expressions are calculated to mislead many pious readers who are apt to take for granted that the headings are as much inspired as the text; or, if not inspired, that they, at least, contain a correct statement of what the text sets forth. The fact is, there is not a syllable about the Church from beginning to end of the prophets. That the Church can find most precious instruction, light, comfort, and edification from this grand division of the inspired volume, is blessedly true; but she will do this just in proportion as she is enabled, by the Spirit's teaching, to discern the real scope and object of this portion of the book of GOD. To suppose, for a moment, that we can only derive comfort and profit from that which exclusively or primarily refers to ourselves, would be to take a very narrow, if not an egotistical, view of things. Can we not learn from the Book of Leviticus And yet who would assert that that section refers to the Church?

No, reader; you may rest assured that a calm, unprejudiced, prayerful study of "**the law the prophets**" will convince you that the great theme of both the one and the other is GOD's government of the world in immediate connection with Israel. True it is, that throughout "**Moses and all the prophets**" there are things concerning (the Lord). Himself. This is plain from Luke 24:27. But it is "**Himself**" in His government of this world, and of Israel in particular. If this fact be not distinctly seized, we shall study the Old Testament with little intelligence or profit.

It may seem to some of our readers, a strong statement to assert that there is nothing about the Church, properly so called, throughout the prophets, or indeed in the Old Testament; but a statement or two from the inspired pen of Paul will settle the whole question for any one who is really willing to submit to the authority of Holy Scripture. Thus in Romans 16. we read, "**Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets evidently of the New Testament, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith**" (Verses 25, 26).

So also in Ephesians 3 we read, "**For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the Grace of God, which is given me to youward; how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ;) which. in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit * that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel. . . and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning**

of the world hath been HID IN GOD, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Verses 1-10.

* The "**Prophets**" in the above quotations, are those of the New Testament, as is evident from the form Of expression. Had the apostle meant Old Testament prophets, he would have said, "**His holy prophets and apostles.**" But the very point he is insisting upon is, that the mystery had never been revealed until his time - that it had not been made known to the sons of men in other ages - that it was hid in GOD; not hid in the Scriptures, but in the infinite mind of GOD.

But we must not pursue this deeply interesting subject of the Church; we have merely referred to the foregoing plain passages of Scripture, in order to settle the reader's mind as to the fact that the doctrine of the Church, as taught by Paul, finds no place in the page of the Old Testament; and therefore, when he reads the prophets and meets the words "**Israel,**" "**Jerusalem,**" "**Zion,**" he is not to apply such terms to the Church of GOD, inasmuch as they belong to the literal people of Israel, the seed of Abraham, the land of Canaan, and the city of Jerusalem. *

* The statement in the text refers, of course, to the Old Testament prophecies. There are passages in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians in which all believers are viewed as the seed of Abraham (see Romans 4: 9-17; Galatians 3:7, 9, 21; 6:16); but this is, obviously, a different thing altogether. We have no revelation of "**the Church,**" properly so called, in the Old Testament Scriptures.

GOD means what He says; and, therefore, we must not countenance anything that borders upon, or looks like, a loose and irreverent mode of handling the Word of GOD. When the Spirit speaks of Jerusalem, He means Jerusalem; if He meant the Church, He would say so. We should not attempt to treat a respectable human document as we treat the inspired volume. We take it for granted that a man not only knows what he means to say, but says what he means; and if this be so, in regard to a poor fallible mortal, how much more so, in regard to the only wise and living GOD, who cannot lie?

But we must draw this section to a close, and leave the reader to meditate alone upon the ordinance of the Nazarite, so pregnant with sacred teaching for the heart. We wish him to ponder, in a special way, the fact that the Holy Ghost has given us the full statement of the law of Nazariteship in the Book of Numbers - the wilderness book.

And not only so, but let him carefully consider the institution itself.

Let him see that he understands why the Nazarite was not to drink wine; why he was not to shave his locks; and why he was not to touch a dead body. Let him meditate upon these three things, and seek; to gather up the instruction contained therein. Let him ask himself, "Do I really long to be a Nazarite - to walk along the narrow path of separation unto GOD and, if so, am I prepared to surrender all those things which tend to defile, to distract, and to hinder GOD's

Nazarites?"

And, finally, let him remember that there is a time coming when "**the Nazarite may drink wine;**" or, in other words, when there will be no need to watch against the varied forms of evil within or around; all will be pure; the affections may flow out without check; the garments may flow around us without a girdle; there will be no evil to be separated from, and therefore there will be no need of separation. In a word, there will be "**a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.**" May GOD, in His infinite mercy, keep us until that blessed time, in true consecration of heart unto Himself.

The reader will observe that we here reach the close of a very distinct section of our book.

- the camp is duly arranged;
- every warrior is set in his proper place (Numbers 1, 2);
- every workman is set to his proper work (Numbers 3, 4);
- the congregation is purified from defilement (Numbers 5).
- provision is made for the highest character of separation to GOD (Numbers 6).

All this is very marked. The order is strikingly beautiful. we have before us not only a cleansed and well ordered camp, but also a character of consecration to GOD beyond which it is impossible to go, inasmuch as it is that which is only seen, in its integrity, in the life of our blessed Lord JESUS CHRIST Himself. Having then reached this lofty point, nothing remains but for the Lord to pronounce His blessing upon the whole congregation, and accordingly we get that blessing at the close of Numbers 6; and surely we may say, a right royal blessing it is. Let us read and consider.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise we shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them."

This copious blessing flows through the channel of priesthood. Aaron and his sons are commissioned to pronounce this wonderful benediction. GOD's assembly is to be blessed and kept of Him, continually; it is ever to bask in the sunlight of His gracious countenance; its peace is to flow as a river; the Lord's name is to be called upon it; He is ever there to bless.

What a provision Oh! that Israel had entered into it, and lived in the power of it! But they did not. They quickly turned aside, as we shall see. They exchanged the light of GOD's countenance for the darkness of Mount Sinai. They abandoned the ground of grace and placed themselves under law. In place of being satisfied with their portion in the GOD of their Fathers, they lusted after other things (Compare Psalm 105 and Psalm 106). In place of the order, the purity, and the separation to GOD with which our book opens, we have disorder, defilement, and giving themselves to idolatry.

But, blessed be GOD, there is a moment approaching in the which the magnificent benediction of Numbers 6 shall have its full application; when Israel's twelve tribes shall be ranged round

that imperishable standard, "**Jehovah-shammah**" (Ezekiel 48:35); when they shall be purified from all their defilements, and consecrated unto GOD in the power of true Nazariteship. These things are set forth in the fullest and clearest manner, throughout the pages of the prophets. All these inspired witnesses, without so much as one dissentient voice, bear testimony to the glorious future in store for the literal Israel; they all point forward to that time when the heavy clouds which have gathered and still hang upon the nation's horizon shall be chased away before the bright beams of "**the Sun of righteousness**;" when Israel shall enjoy a cloudless day of bliss and glory, beneath the vines and fig-trees of that very land which GOD gave as an everlasting possession unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

If we deny the foregoing, we may as well cut out a large portion of the Old Testament, and not a small Part of the New, for in both the one and the other the Holy Ghost doth most clearly and unequivocally bear testimony to this precious fact, namely, mercy, salvation, and blessing to the seed of Jacob.

We hesitate not to declare our conviction that no one can possibly understand the Prophets who does not see this. There is a bright future in store for GOD's beloved, though now rejected people. Let us beware How we deal with this fact. It is a very grave matter to attempt to interfere, in any wise, with the true and proper application of the Word of GOD.

If He has pledged Himself to bless the nation of Israel, let us have a care how we seek to force the stream of blessing to flow in a different channel. It is a serious thing to tamper with the declared purpose of GOD. He has declared it to be His purpose to give the land of Canaan an everlasting possession to the seed of Jacob; and if this be called in question, we do not see how we can hold fast the integrity of any one portion of the Word of GOD. If we show ourselves to trifle with a large division of the inspired canon and most assuredly it is trifling with it when we seek to divert it from its true object - then what security have we in reference to the application of Scripture at all? If GOD does not mean what He says when He speaks of Israel and the land of Canaan, how do we know that He means what He says when He speaks of the Church and her heavenly portion in CHRIST? If the Jew be robbed of his glorious future, what security has the Christian as to his?

Reader, let us remember that "**All (not merely some of) the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus**," and while we rejoice in the application of this precious statement to ourselves, let us not seek to deny its application to others.

We most fully believe that the children of Israel shall yet enjoy the full tide of blessing presented in the closing paragraph of Numbers 6; and until then the Church of GOD is called to partake of blessings peculiar to herself. She is privileged to know the presence of GOD with her and in her midst continually - to dwell in the light of His countenance - to drink of the river of peace - to be blessed and kept, from day to day, by Him who never slumbers nor sleeps. But let us never forget - yea: let us deeply and constantly remember - that the practical sense and experimental enjoyment of these immense blessings and privileges will be in exact proportion to the measure in which the Church seeks to maintain the order, the purity, and the Nazarite separation to which she is called as the dwelling-place of GOD - the body of CHRIST - the habitation of the Holy Ghost.

May these things sink down into our hearts, and exert their sanctifying influence upon our whole life and character!

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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