

**NOTES**  
**ON**  
**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

by

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*"Things new and old."*

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**Numbers 25 - Numbers 26**

Here a new scene opens upon our view. We have been on the top of Pisgah, hearkening to GOD's testimony respecting Israel, and there all was bright and fair, without a cloud, without a spot. But now we find ourselves in the plains of Moab, and all is changed. There, we had to do with GOD and His thoughts. Here, we have to do with the people and their joys. What a contrast! It reminds us of the opening and the close of II Corinthians 12. In the former, we have the positive standing of the Christian; in the latter, the possible state into which he may fall if not watchful. That shows us "**a man in Christ**" capable of being caught up into paradise, at any moment. This shows us saints of GOD capable of plunging into all manner of sin and folly.

*Thus it is with Israel, as seen from "**the top of the rocks,**" in "**the vision of the almighty,**" and Israel as seen in the plains of Moab.*

In the one case, we have their perfect standing; in the other, their imperfect state. Balaam's parables give us GOD's estimate of the former; the javelin of Phinehas, His judgment upon the latter. GOD will never reverse His decision as to what His people are as to standing; but he must judge and chasten them when their ways comport not with that standing. It is His gracious will that their state should correspond with their standing. But here is, alas! where failure comes in. Nature is allowed to act in various ways, and our GOD is constrained to take down the rod of discipline, in order that the evil thing which we have suffered to manifest itself may be crushed and subdued.

Thus it is in Numbers 25. Balaam, having failed in his attempt to curse Israel, succeeds in seducing them, his wiles, to commit sin, hoping whereby to gain his end.

**"And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel" (Ver. 3, 4).**

Then we have the striking record of the zeal and faithfulness of Phinehas:

**"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Verse 10-13).**

GOD's glory and Israel's good were the objects that ruled the conduct of the faithful Phinehas on this occasion. It was a critical moment. He felt there was a demand for the most stern action. It was no time for false tenderness. There are moments in the history of GOD's people in the which tenderness to man becomes unfaithfulness to GOD; and it is of the utmost importance to be able to discern such moments. The prompt acting of Phinehas saved the whole congregation, glorified the Lord in the midst of His people, and completely frustrated the enemy's design. Balaam fell among the judged Midianites; but Phinehas became the possessor of an everlasting priesthood.

Thus much as to the solemn instruction contained in this brief section of our book, May we profit by it. May GOD's Spirit give us such an abiding sense of the perfection of our standing in CHRIST, that our practical ways may be more in accordance with it!

## **Numbers 26**

This, though one of the longest chapters in our book, does not call for much in the way of remark or exposition. In it we have the record of the second numbering of the people, as they were about to enter upon the promised land. How sad to think that, out of the six hundred thousand men of war which were numbered, at the first, only two remain - Joshua and Caleb! All the rest lay mouldering in the dust, buried beneath the sand of the desert, all passed away. The two men of simple faith remained to have their faith rewarded. As for the men of unbelief, the inspired apostle tells us **"their carcasses fell in the wilderness."**

How solemn! How full of instruction and admonition for us! Unbelief kept the first generation from entering the land of Canaan, and caused them to die in the wilderness.

This is the fact on which the Holy Ghost grounds one of the most searching warnings and exhortations anywhere to be found in the compass of the inspired volume. Let us hear it!

**"Wherefore . . . take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily while it is called To day; lest**

**any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; while it is said, To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, Whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. 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. For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard"**  
(Hebrews 3:7-4:1, 2).

Here lies the great practical secret. The Word of GOD mixed with faith. Precious mixture! the only thing that can really profit any one. We may hear a great deal; we may talk a great deal; we may profess a great deal; but we may rest assured that the measure of real spiritual power - power to surmount difficulties - power to overcome the world - power to get on - power to possess ourselves of all that GOD has bestowed upon us - the measure of this power is simply the measure in which GOD's Word is mixed with faith.

That word is settled for ever in Heaven; and if it is fixed in our hearts, by faith, there is a divine link connecting us with Heaven and all that belongs to it; and, in proportion as our hearts are thus livingly linked with Heaven and the CHRIST who is there, shall we be practically separated from this present world, and lifted above its influence.

Faith takes possession of all that GOD has given. It enters into that within the veil; it endures as seeing Him who is invisible; it occupies itself with the unseen and eternal, not with the seen and the temporal. Men think possession sure; faith knows nothing sure but GOD and His Word. Faith takes GOD's Word and locks it up in the very innermost chamber of the heart, and there it remains as hid treasure - the only thing that deserves to be called treasure. The happy possessor of this treasure is rendered thoroughly independent of the world. He may be poor as regards the riches of this perishing scene; but if only he is rich in faith, he is the possessor of untold wealth - **"durable riches and righteousness" - "the unsearchable riches of Christ."**

Reader, these are not the pencilings of fancy - the mere visions of the imagination. No; they are substantial verities - divine realities, which you may now enjoy in all their preciousness.

If you will only take GOD at His Word - only believe what He says because He says it - for this is faith - then verily you have this treasure, which renders its possessor entirely independent of this scene where men live only by the sight of their eyes. The men of this world speak of the positive and the real, meaning thereby what they can see and experience; in other words, the things of time and sense - the tangible - the palpable. Faith knows nothing positive, nothing real, but the word of the living GOD.

Now it was the lack of this blessed faith that kept Israel out of Canaan, and caused six hundred thousand carcasses to fall in the wilderness.

It is the lack of this faith:

- that keeps thousands of GOD's people in bondage and darkness, when they ought to be walking in liberty and light
- that keeps them in depression and gloom, when they ought to be walking in the joy and strength of GOD's full salvation
- that keeps them in fear of judgment, when they ought to be walking in the hope of glory
- that keeps them in doubt as to whether they shall escape the sword of the destroyer in Egypt, when they ought to be feasting on the old corn of the land of Canaan.

Oh! that GOD's people would consider these things in the secret of His presence and in the light of His Word! Then indeed they would better know and more fully appreciate the fair inheritance which faith finds in the eternal Word of GOD - they would more clearly apprehend the things which are freely given to us of GOD in the Son of His love. May the Lord send out His light and His truth, and lead His people into the fullness of their portion in CHRIST, so that they may take their true place, and yield a true testimony for Him, while waiting for His glorious advent.

~ end of chapter 25, 26 ~

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