

THE FOURTH BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED

NUMBERS

This book is called NUMBERS from the several numberings of the people contained in it. It extends from the giving of the law at Sinai, till their arrival in the plains of Jordan. An account is given of their murmuring and unbelief, for which they were sentenced to wander in the wilderness nearly forty years; also some laws, both moral and ceremonial. Their trials greatly tended to distinguish the wicked and hypocrites from the faithful and true servants of God, who served him with a pure heart.

CHAPTER 1

The numbering of the Israelites. (1-43) The number of the people. (44-46) The Levites not numbered with the rest. (47-54)

Numbers 1:1

Vs. 1-43: The people were numbered to show God's faithfulness in thus increasing the seed of Jacob, that they might be the better trained for the wars and conquest of Canaan, and to ascertain their families in order to the division of the land. It is said of each tribe, that those were numbered who were able to go forth to war; they had wars before them, though now they met with no opposition. Let the believer be prepared to withstand the enemies of his soul, though all may appear to be peace.

Numbers 1:44

Vs. 44-46: We have here the sum total. How much was required to maintain all these in the wilderness! They were all provided for by God every day. When we observe the faithfulness of God, however unlikely the performance of his promise may appear, we may take courage as to those which yet remain to be fulfilled to the church of God.

Numbers 1:47

Vs. 47-54: Care is here taken to distinguish the tribe of Levi, which, in the matter of the golden calf, had distinguished itself. Singular services shall be recompensed by singular honors. It was to the honor of the Levites, that to them was committed the care of the tabernacle and its treasures, in their camps and in their marches. It was for the honor of the holy things that none should see them, or touch them, but those who were called of God to the service. We all are unfit and unworthy to have fellowship with God, till called by his grace into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and so, being the spiritual seed of that great High Priest, we are made priests to our God. Great care must be taken to prevent sin, for preventing sin is preventing wrath. Being a holy tribe, they were not reckoned among other Israelites. They that minister about holy things, should neither entangle themselves, nor be entangled, in worldly affairs. And let every believer seek to do what the Lord has commanded.

CHAPTER 2

The order of the tribes in their tents.

Numbers 2:1

The tribes were to encamp about the tabernacle, which was to be in the midst of them. It was a token of God's gracious presence. Yet they were to pitch their tents afar off, in reverence to the sanctuary. The children of Israel put themselves in their posts, without murmuring or disputing; and as it was their safety, so it was their beauty. It is our duty and interest to be contented with the place allotted to us, and to endeavor to occupy it in a proper manner, without envying or murmuring; without ambition or covetousness. Thus the gospel church ought to be compact, according to the Scripture model, every one knowing and keeping his place; and then all that wish well to the church rejoice, beholding their order, ^{<SMF>}Colossians 2:5.

CHAPTER 3

The sons of Aaron, The Levites taken instead of the first-born.

(1-13) The Levites numbered by their families, Their duties. (14-39)

The first-born are numbered. (40-51)

<GEB> **Numbers 3:1**

Vs. 1-13: There was much work belonging to the priests' office, and there were now only Aaron and his two sons to do it; God appoints the Levites to attend them. Those whom God finds work for, he will find help for. The Levites were taken instead of the first-born. When He that made us, saves us, as the first-born of Israel were saved, we are laid under further obligations to serve him faithfully. God's right to us by redemption, confirms the right he has to us by creation.

<GEB> **Numbers 3:14**

Vs. 14-39: The Levites were in three classes, according to the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; and these were subdivided into families. The posterity of Moses were not at all honored or privileged, but stood upon the level with other Levites; thus it was plain, that Moses did not seek the advancement of his own family, or to secure any honors to it. The tribe of Levi was by much the least of all the tribes. God's chosen are but a little flock in comparison with the world.

<GEB> **Numbers 3:40**

Vs. 40-51: The number of the first-born, and that of the Levites, came near to each other. Known unto God are all his works beforehand; there is an exact proportion between them, and so it will appear, when they are compared together. The small number of first-born, over and above the number of the Levites, were to be redeemed, and the redemption-money given to Aaron. The church is called the church of the first-born, which is redeemed, not as they were, with silver and gold; but, being devoted by sin to the justice of God, is ransomed with the precious blood of the Son of God. All men are the Lord's by creation, and all true Christians are his by

redemption. Each should know his own post and duty; nor can any service required by such a Master be rightly accounted mean or hard.

CHAPTER 4

The Levites' service. (1-3) The duties of the Kohathites. (4-20) The duties of the Gershonites and Merarites. (21-33) The numbers of the serviceable Levites. (34-49)

Numbers 4:1

Vs. 1-3: The middle-aged men of the tribe of Levi, all from thirty years old to fifty, were to be employed in the service of the tabernacle. The service of God requires the best of our strength, and the prime portion of our time, which cannot be better spent than to the honor of Him who is the First and Best. And the service of God should be done when we are most lively and active. Those do not consider this who put off repentance to old age, and so leave the best work to be done in the worst time.

Numbers 4:4

Vs. 4-20: The Kohathites were to carry the holy things of the tabernacle. All the holy things were to be covered; not only for security and respect, but to keep them from being seen. This not only marked the reverence due to holy things, but the mystery of the things signified by those types, and the darkness of the dispensation. But now, through Christ, the case is altered, and we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace.

Numbers 4:21

Vs. 21-33: We have here the charge of the other two families of the Levites, which, though not so honorable as the first, yet was necessary, and to be done regularly. All the things were delivered them by name. It intimates the care God takes of his church and every member of it. The death of the saints is represented as the taking down of the tabernacle, ^(COR)2 Corinthians 5:1, and the putting it off, ^(COR)2 Peter 1:14. All shall be raised up in the great day, when these vile bodies shall be made like the glorious body of Jesus Christ, and so shall be for ever with the Lord.

Numbers 4:34

Vs. 34-49: God so ordered it, that though the Merarites were the fewest in number, yet they should have most able men among them; for whatever service God calls men to, he will furnish them for it, give strength in proportion to the work, and grace sufficient. The least of the tribes had many more able men than the Levites: those who engage in the service of this world, are many more than those devoted to the service of God. May our souls be wholly devoted to his service.

CHAPTER 5

The unequaled to be removed out of the camp, Restitution to be made for trespasses. (1-10) The trial of jealousy. (11-31)

Numbers 5:1

Vs. 1-10: The camp was to be cleansed. The purity of the church must be kept as carefully as the peace and order of it. Every polluted Israelite must be separated. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable. The greater profession of religion any house or family makes, the more they are obliged to put away iniquity far from them. If a man overreach or defraud his brother in any matter, it is a trespass against the Lord, who strictly charges and commands us to do justly. What is to be done when a man's awakened conscience charges him with guilt of this kind, though done long ago? He must confess his sin, confess it to God, confess it to his neighbor, and take shame to himself; though it go against him to own himself in a lie, yet he must do it. Satisfaction must be made for the offense done to God, as well as for the loss sustained by the neighbor; restitution in that case is not enough without faith and repentance. While that which is wrongfully gotten is knowingly kept, the guilt remains on the conscience, and is not done away by sacrifice or offering, prayers or tears; for it is the same act of sin persisted in. This is the doctrine of right reason, and of the word of God. It detects hypocrites, and directs the tender conscience to proper conduct, which, springing from faith in Christ, will make way for inward peace.

Numbers 5:11

Vs. 11-31: This law would make the women of Israel watch against giving cause for suspicion. On the other hand, it would hinder the cruel treatment such suspicions might occasion. It would also hinder the guilty from escaping, and the innocent from coming under just suspicion. When no proof could be brought, the wife was called on to make this solemn appeal to a heart-searching God. No woman, if she were guilty, could say "Amen" to the adjuration, and drink the water after it, unless she disbelieved the truth of God, or defied his justice. The water is called the bitter water, because it caused the curse. Thus sin is called an evil and a bitter thing. Let

all that meddle with forbidden pleasures, know that they will be bitterness in the latter end. From the whole learn,

- 1.** Secret sins are known to God, and sometimes are strangely brought to light in this life; and that there is a day coming when God will, by Christ, judge the secrets of men according to the gospel, ¹⁶Romans 2:16.
- 2.** In particular, Whoremongers and adulterers God will surely judge. Though we have not now the waters of jealousy, yet we have God's word, which ought to be as great a terror. Sensual lusts will end in bitterness.
- 3.** God will manifest the innocency of the innocent. The same providence is for good to some, and for hurt to others. And it will answer the purposes which God intends.

CHAPTER 6

The law concerning the Nazarites. (1-21) The form of blessing the people. (22-27)

Numbers 6:1

Vs. 1-21: The word Nazarite signifies separation. Some were appointed of God, before their birth, to be Nazarites all their days, as Samson and John the Baptist. But, in general, it was a vow of separation from the world and devotedness to the services of religion, for a limited time, and under certain rules, which any person might make if they pleased. A Nazarite is spoken of as well known; but his obligation is brought to a greater certainty than before. That the fancies of superstitious men might not multiply the restraints endlessly, God gives them rules. They must not drink wine or strong drink, nor eat grapes. Those who separate themselves to God, must not gratify the desires of the body, but keep it under. Let all Christians be very moderate in the use of wine and strong drink; for if the love of these once gets the mastery of a man, he becomes an easy prey to Satan. The Nazarites were to eat nothing that came of the vine; this may teach the utmost care to avoid sin, and all that borders upon it, and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us. They must not cut their hair. They must neither poll their heads, nor shave their beards; this was the mark of Samson being a Nazarite. This signified neglect of the body, and of the ease and ornament of it. Those who separate themselves to God, must keep their consciences pure from dead works, and not touch unequaled things. All the days of their separation they must be holy to the Lord. This was the meaning of those outward observances, and without this they were of no account. No penalty or sacrifice was appointed for those who willfully broke their vow of being Nazarites; they must answer another day for such profane trifling with the Lord their God; but those were to be relieved who did not sin willfully. There is nothing in Scripture that bears the least resemblance to the religious orders of the church of Rome, except these Nazarites. But mark the difference, or rather how completely opposed! The religious of that church are forbidden to marry; but no such restriction is laid upon the Nazarites. They are commanded to abstain from meats; but the Nazarites might eat any food allowed other Israelites. They are not

generally forbidden wine, not even on their fasting days; but the Nazarites might not have wine at any time. Their vow is lasting, even to the end of their lives; the Nazarites' vow was only for a limited time, at their own will; and in certain cases not unless allowed by husbands or parents. Such a thorough difference there is between rules of man's invention and those directed in Scripture. Let us not forget that the Lord Jesus is not only our Surety, but also our example. For his sake we must renounce worldly pleasures, abstain from fleshy lusts, be separate from sinners, make open profession of our faith, moderate natural affection, be spiritually-minded, and devoted to God's service, and desirous to be an example all around us.

~~4062~~ **Numbers 6:22**

Vs. 22-27: The priests were solemnly to bless the people in the name of the Lord. To be under the almighty protection of God our Savior; to enjoy his favor as the smile of a loving Father, or as the cheering beams of the sun; while he mercifully forgives our sins, supplies our wants, consoles the heart, and prepares us by his grace for eternal glory; these things form the substance of this blessing, and the sum total of all blessings. In so rich a list of mercies worldly joys are not worthy to be mentioned. Here is a form of prayer. The name Jehovah is three times repeated. The Jews think there is some mystery; and we know what it is, the New Testament having explained it. There we are directed to expect the blessing from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, ~~47134~~ 2 Corinthians 13:14; each of which Persons is Jehovah, and yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.

CHAPTER 7

The offerings of the princes at the dedication of the tabernacle. (1-9)

The offerings of the princes at the dedication of the altar. (10-89)

Numbers 7:1

Vs. 1-9: The offering of the princes to the service of the tabernacle was not made till it was fully set up. Necessary observances must always take place of free-will offerings. The more any are advanced, the greater opportunity they have of serving God and their generation. No sooner was the tabernacle set up, than provision is made for the removal of it. Even when but just settled in the world, we must be preparing for changes and removes, especially for the great change.

Numbers 7:10

Vs. 10-89: The princes and great men were most forward in the service of God. Here is an example to those in authority, and of the highest rank; they ought to use their honor and power, their estate and interest, to promote religion and the service of God in the places where they live. Though it was a time of joy and rejoicing, yet still, in the midst of their sacrifices, we find a sin-offering. As, in our best services, we are conscious that there is sin, there should be repentance, even in our most joyful services. In all approaches to God we must by faith look to Christ as the Sin-offering. They brought their offerings each on a day. God's work should not be done confusedly, or in a hurry; take time, and we shall have done the sooner, or, at least, we shall have done the better. If services are to be done for twelve days together, we must not call it a task and a burden. All their offerings were the same; all the tribes of Israel had an equal share in the altar, and an equal interest in the sacrifices offered upon it. He who now spake to Moses, as the Shechinah or Divine Majesty, from between the Cherubim, was the Eternal Word, the second Person in the Trinity; for all God's communion with man is by his Son, by whom he made the world, and rules the church, who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

CHAPTER 8

The lamps of the sanctuary. (1-4) Consecration of the Levites, and their service. (5-26)

Numbers 8:1

Vs. 1-4: Aaron himself lighted the lamps, thus representing his Divine Master. The Scripture is a light shining in a dark place, ^{GOE}2 Peter 1:19. A dark place even the church would be without it; as the tabernacle, which had no window, would have been without the lamps. The work of ministers is to light these lamps, by expounding and applying the word of God. Jesus Christ is the only Light of our dark, sinful world; and by his atonement, by his word and the Holy Spirit, he diffuses light around.

Numbers 8:5

Vs. 5-26: Here we have directions for the solemn ordination of the Levites. All Israel must know that they took not this honor to themselves, but were called of God to it; nor was it enough that they were distinguished from others. All who are employed for God, must be dedicated to him, according to the employment. Christians must be baptized, ministers must be ordained; we must first give ourselves unto the Lord, and then our services. The Levites must be cleansed. They must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. Moses must sprinkle the water of purifying upon them. This signifies the application of the blood of Christ to our souls by faith, that we may be fit to serve the living God. God declares his acceptance of them. All who expect to share in the privileges of the tabernacle, must resolve to do the service of the tabernacle. As, on the one hand, none of God's creatures are his necessary servants, he needs not the service of any of them; so none are merely honorary servants, to do nothing. All whom God owns, he employs; angels themselves have their services.

CHAPTER 9

Of the Passover. (1-14) The removals of the Israelites. (15-23)

Numbers 9:1

Vs. 1-14: God gave particular orders for the keeping of this Passover, and, for ought that appears, after this, they kept no Passover till they came to Canaan, ⁽¹⁵⁾Joshua 5:10. It early showed that the ceremonial institutions were not to continue always, as so soon after they were appointed, some were suffered to sleep for many years. But the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was not thus set aside in the first days of the Christian church, although those were days of greater difficulty and distress than Israel knew in the wilderness; nay, in the times of persecution, the Lord's Supper was celebrated more frequently than afterward. Israelites in the wilderness could not forget the deliverance out of Egypt. There was danger of this when they came to Canaan. Instructions were given concerning those who were ceremonially unequaled, when they were to eat the Passover. Those whose minds and consciences are defiled by sin, are unfit for communion with God, and cannot partake with comfort of the gospel Passover, till they are cleansed by true repentance and faith. Observe with what trouble and concern these men complained that they were kept back from offering to the Lord. It should be a trouble to us, when by any occasion we are kept back from the solemnities of a Sabbath or a sacrament. Observe the deliberation of Moses in resolving this case. Ministers must ask counsel of God's mouth, not determine according to their own fancy or affection, but according to the word of God to the best of their knowledge. And if, in difficult cases, time is taken to spread the matter before God by humble, believing prayer, the Holy Spirit assuredly will direct in the good and right way. God gave directions in this case, and in other similar cases, explanatory of the law of the Passover. As those who, against their minds, are forced to absent themselves from God's ordinances, may expect the favors of God's grace under their affliction, so those who, of choice, absent themselves, may expect God's wrath for their sin. Be not deceived: God is not mocked.

Numbers 9:15

Vs. 15-23 This cloud was appointed to be the visible sign and symbol of God's presence with Israel. Thus we are taught to see God always near us, both night and day. As long as the cloud rested on the tabernacle, so long they continued in the same place. There is no time lost, while we are waiting God's time. When the cloud was taken up, they removed, however comfortably they were encamped. We are kept at uncertainty concerning the time of our putting off the earthly house of this tabernacle, that we may be always ready to remove at the command of the Lord. It is very safe and pleasant going when we see God before us, and resting where he appoints us to rest. The leading of this cloud is spoken of as signifying the guidance of the blessed Spirit. We are not now to expect such tokens of the Divine presence and guidance; but the promise is sure to all God's spiritual Israel, that he will guide them by his counsel. ^{<4723>}Psalm 73:24, even unto death, ^{<4984>}Psalm 48:14. All the children of God shall be led by the Spirit of God, ^{<6084>}Romans 8:14. He will direct the paths of those who in all their ways acknowledge him, ^{<2086>}Proverbs 3:6. At the commandment of the Lord, our hearts should always move and rest, saying, Father, thy will be done; dispose of me and mine as thou pleasest. What thou wilt, and where thou wilt; only let me be thine, and always in the way of my duty. In applying general precepts to particular circumstances, there should be good counsel and fervent prayer. When any undertaking is evidently wrong, or doubtfully right, and yet the mind leans that way, in such a case "the moving of the cloud," as men sometimes miscall it, is generally no more than a temptation Satan is permitted to propose; and men fancy they are following the Lord, when they are following their own wayward unequalled. The record of his mercy will conduct us with unerring truth, through Christ, to everlasting peace. Follow the pillar of the cloud and of fire. Lay the BIBLE to heart, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

CHAPTER 10

The silver trumpets. (1-10) The Israelites remove from Sinai to Paran. (11-28) Hobab entreated by Moses to continue. (29-32) The blessing pronounced by Moses. (33-36)

Numbers 10:1

Vs. 1-10: Here are directions concerning the public notices to be given the people by sound of trumpet. Their laws in every case were to be Divine, therefore, even in this matter Moses is directed. These trumpets typify the preached gospel. It sounds an alarm to sinners, calls them to repent, proclaims liberty to the captives and slaves of Satan, and collects the worshippers of God. It directs and encourages their heavenly journey; stirs them up to combat against the world and sin, encouraging them with the assurance of victory. It leads their attention to the sacrifice of Christ, and shows the Lord's presence for their protection. It is also necessary that the gospel trumpet give a distinct sound, according to the persons addressed, or the end proposed; whether to convince, humble, console, exhort, reprove, or teach. The sounding of the trumpet of the gospel is God's ordinance, and demands the attention of all to whom it is sent.

Numbers 10:11

Vs. 11-28: After the Israelites had continued nearly a year at mount Sinai, and all was settled respecting their future worship, they began their march to Canaan. True religion begins with the knowledge of the holy law of God, and humiliation for sin, but we must go on towards perfection, in acquaintance with Christ and his gospel, and those effectual encouragements, motives, and assistances to holiness, which it proposes. They took their journey according to the commandment of the Lord, **Deuteronomy 1:6-8**, and as the cloud led them. Those who give themselves to the direction of God's word and Spirit, steer a steady course, even when they seem bewildered. While they are sure they cannot lose their God and Guide, they need not fear losing their way. They went out of the wilderness of Sinai, and rested in the wilderness of Paran. All our removes in this world are but from one wilderness to another. The changes we think will be for the better do not always prove so. We shall

never be at rest, never at home, till we come to heaven, but all will be well there.

Numbers 10:29

Vs. 29-32: Moses invites his kindred to go to Canaan. Those that are bound for the heavenly Canaan, should ask and encourage their friends to go with them: we shall have none the less of the joys of heaven, for others coming to share with us. It is good having fellowship with those who have fellowship with God. But the things of this world, which are seen, draw strongly from the pursuit of the things of the other world, which are not seen. Moses urges that Hobab might be serviceable to them. Not to show where they must encamp, nor what way they must march, the cloud was to direct that; but to show the conveniences of the place they marched through, and encamped in. It well consists with our trust in God's providence, to use the help of our friends.

Numbers 10:33

Vs. 33-36: Their going out and coming in, gives an example to us to begin and end every day's journey and every day's work with prayer. Here is Moses's prayer when the ark set forward, "Rise up, and let thine enemies be scattered." There are those in the world who are enemies to God and haters of him; secret and open enemies; enemies to his truths, his laws, his ordinances, his people. But for the scattering and defeating of God's enemies, there needs no more than God's arising. Observe also the prayer of Moses when the ark rested, that God would cause his people to rest. The welfare and happiness of the Israel of God, consist in the continual presence of God among them. Their safety is not in their numbers, but in the favor of God, and his gracious return to them, and resting with them. Upon this account, Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people! God will go before them, to find them resting-places by the way. His promise is, and their prayers are, that he will never leave them nor forsake them.

CHAPTER 11

The burning at Taberah. (1-3) The people lust for flesh, and loathe the manna. (4-9) Moses complains of his charge. (10-15) Elders appointed to divide the charge. Flesh meat promised. (16-23) The Spirit rests on the elders. (24-30) Quails are given. (31-35)

Numbers 11:1

Vs. 1-3: Here is the people's sin; they complained. See the sinfulness of sin, which takes occasion from the commandment to be provoking. The weakness of the law discovered sin, but could not destroy it; checked, but could not conquer it. They complained. Those who are of a discontented spirit, will always find something to quarrel or fret about, though the circumstances of their outward condition be ever so favorable. The Lord heard it, though Moses did not. God knows the secret frettings and murmurings of the heart, though concealed from men. What he noticed, he was much displeased with, and he chastised them for this sin. The fire of their wrath against God burned in their minds; justly did the fire of God's wrath fasten on their bodies; but God's judgments came on them gradually, that they might take warning. It appeared that God delights not in punishing; when he begins, he is soon prevailed with to let it fall.

Numbers 11:4

Vs. 4-9: Man, having forsaken his proper rest, feels uneasy and wretched, though prosperous. They were weary of the provision God had made for them, although wholesome food and nourishing. It cost no money or care, and the labor of gathering it was very little indeed; yet they talked of Egypt's cheapness, and the fish they ate there freely; as if that cost them nothing, when they paid dearly for it with hard service! While they lived on manna, they seemed exempt from the curse sin has brought on man, that in the sweat of his face he should eat bread; yet they speak of it with scorn. Peevish, discontented minds will find fault with that which has no fault in it, but that it is too good for them. Those who might be happy, often make themselves miserable by discontent. They could not be satisfied unless they had flesh to eat. It is evidence of the dominion of the carnal mind, when we want to have the delights and satisfaction of sense.

We should not indulge in any desire which we cannot in faith turn into prayer, as we cannot when we ask meat for our lust. What is lawful of itself becomes evil, when God does not allot it to us, yet we desire it.

Numbers 11:10

Vs. 10-15: The provocation was very great; yet Moses expressed himself otherwise than became him. He undervalued the honor God had put upon him. He magnified his own performances, while he had the Divine wisdom to direct him, and Almighty power to dispense rewards and punishments. He speaks distrustfully of the Divine grace. Had the work been much less he could not have gone through it in his own strength; but had it been much greater, through God strengthening him, he might have done it. Let us pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation.

Numbers 11:16

Vs. 16-23: Moses is to choose such as he knew to be elders, that is, wise and experienced men. God promises to qualify them. If they were not found fit for the employ, they should be made fit. Even the discontented people shall be gratified too, that every mouth may be stopped. See here,

1. The vanity of all the delights of sense; they will cloy, but they will not satisfy. Spiritual pleasures alone will satisfy and last. As the world passes away, so do the lusts of it.
2. What brutish sins gluttony and drunkenness are! they make that to hurt the body which should be its health. Moses objects.

Even true and great believers sometimes find it hard to trust God under the discouragements of second causes, and against hope to believe in hope. God here brings Moses to this point, The Lord God is Almighty; and puts the proof upon the issue, Thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass or not. If he speaks, it is done.

Numbers 11:24

Vs. 24-30: We have here the fulfillment of God's word to Moses, that he should have help in the government of Israel. He gave of his Spirit to the seventy elders. They discoursed to the people of the things of God, so that all who heard them might say, that God was with them of a truth.

Two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, went not out unto the tabernacle, as the rest, being sensible of their own weakness and unworthiness. But the Spirit of God found them in the camp, and there they exercised their gift of praying, preaching, and praising God; they spake as moved by the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God is not confined to the tabernacle, but, like the wind, blows where He listeth. And they that humble themselves shall be exalted; and those who are most fit for government, are least ambitious of it. Joshua does not desire that they should be punished, but only restrained for the future. This motion he made out of zeal for what he thought to be the unity of the church. He would have them silenced, lest they should occasion a schism, or should rival Moses; but Moses was not afraid of any such effects from that Spirit which God had put upon them. Shall we reject those whom Christ has owned, or restrain any from doing good, because they are not in every thing of our mind? Moses wishes all the Lord's people were prophets, that he would put his Spirit upon all of them. Let the testimony of Moses be believed by those who desire to be in power; that government is a burden. It is a burden of care and trouble to those who make conscience of the duty of it; and to those who do not, it will prove a heavier burden in the day of account. Let the example of Moses be followed by those in power; let them not despise the advice and assistance of others, but desire it, and be thankful for it. If all the present number of the Lord's people were rendered prophets, or ministers, by the Spirit of Christ, though not all agreed in outward matters, there is work enough for all, in calling sinners to repentance, and faith in our Lord Jesus.

Numbers 11:31

Vs. 31-35: God performed his promise to the people, in giving them flesh. How much more diligent men are in collecting the meat that perishes, than in laboring for meat which endures to everlasting life! We are quick-sighted in the affairs of time; but stupidity blinds us as to the concerns of eternity. To pursue worldly advantages, we need no arguments; but when we are to secure the true riches, then we are all forgetfulness. Those who are under the power of a carnal mind, will have their lusts fulfilled, though it be to the certain damage and ruin of their precious souls. They paid dearly for their feasts. God often grants the desires of sinners in wrath, while he denies the desires of his own people in love. What we unduly desire, if we obtain it, we have reason to fear, will be some way or other a grief and

cross to us. And what multitudes there are in all places, who shorten their lives by excess of one kind or other! Let us seek for those pleasures which satisfy, but never surfeit; and which will endure for evermore.

CHAPTER 12

God rebukes the murmuring of Aaron and Miriam. (1-9) Miriam struck with leprosy, and healed at the prayer of Moses. (10-16)

Numbers 12:1

Vs. 1-9: The patience of Moses was tried in his own family, as well as by the people. The pretense was, that he had married a foreign wife; but probably their pride was hurt, and their envy stirred up, by his superior authority. Opposition from our near relations, and from religious friends, is most painful. But this is to be looked for, and it will be well if in such circumstances we can preserve the gentleness and meekness of Moses. Moses was thus fitted to the work he was called to. God not only cleared Moses, but praised him. Moses had the spirit of prophecy in a way which set him far above all other prophets; yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he; and our Lord Jesus infinitely excellencies him, ^{<BIB>}Hebrews 3:1. Let Miriam and Aaron consider whom it was they insulted. We have reason to be afraid of saying or doing any thing against the servants of God. And those are presumptuous indeed who are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, ^{<BIB>}2 Peter 2:10. The removal of God's presence is the surest and saddest token of God's displeasure. Woe to us, if he depart! he never departs, till by sin and folly we drive him from us.

Numbers 12:10

Vs. 10-16: The cloud departed, and Miriam became leprous. When God goes, evil comes: expect no good when God departs. Her foul tongue, as Bishop Hall says, was justly punished with a foul face. Aaron, as priest, was judge of the leprosy. He could not pronounce her leprous without trembling, knowing himself to be equally guilty. But if she was thus punished for speaking against Moses, what will become of those who sin against Christ? Aaron, who joined his sister in speaking against Moses, is forced for himself and his sister, to beseech him, and to speak highly of him whom he had so lately blamed. Those who trample upon the saints and servants of God, will one day be glad to make court to them. It is well when rebukes produce confession of sin and repentance. Such offenders, though corrected and disgraced, shall be pardoned. Moses made it appear,

that he forgave the injury done him. To this pattern of Moses, and that of our Savior, who said, "Father, forgive them," we must conform. A reason is given for Miriam's being put out of the camp for seven days; because thus she ought to accept the punishment of her sin. When under the tokens of God's displeasure for sin, it becomes us to take shame to ourselves. This hindered the people's progress in their march forward towards Canaan. Many things oppose us, but nothing so hinders us in the way to heaven, as sin.

CHAPTER 13

*Twelve men sent to search the land of Canaan, Their instructions.
(1-20) Their proceedings. (21-25) Their account of the land.
(26-33)*

Numbers 13:1

Vs. 1-20: A memorable and melancholy history is related in this and the following chapter, of the turning back of Israel from the borders of Canaan, and the sentencing them to wander and perish in the wilderness, for their unbelief and murmuring. It appears, ^(1:22)Deuteronomy 1:22, that the motion to search out the land came from the people. They had a better opinion of their own policy than of God's wisdom. Thus we ruin ourselves by believing the reports and representations of sense rather than Divine revelation. We walk by sight not by faith. Moses gave the spies this charge, Be of good courage. It was not only a great undertaking they were put upon, which required good management and resolution; but a great trust was reposed in them, which required that they should be faithful. Courage in such circumstances can only spring from strong faith, which Caleb and Joshua alone possessed.

Numbers 13:21

Vs. 21-25: The searchers of the land brought a bunch of grapes with them, and other fruits, as proofs of the goodness of the country; which was to Israel both the earnest and the specimen of all the fruits of Canaan. Such are the present comforts we have in communion with God, foretastes of the fullness of joy we expect in the heavenly Canaan. We may see by them what heaven is.

Numbers 13:26

Vs. 26-33: We may wonder that the people of Israel staid forty days for the return of their spies, when they were ready to enter Canaan, under all the assurances of success they could have from the Divine power, and the miracles that had hitherto attended them. But they distrusted God's power and promise. How much we stand in our own light by our unbelief! At

length the messengers returned; but the greater part discouraged the people from going forward to Canaan. Justly are the Israelites left to this temptation, for putting confidence in the judgment of men, when they had the word of God to trust in. Though they had found the land as good as God had said, yet they would not believe it to be as sure as he had said, but despaired of having it, though Eternal Truth had engaged it to them. This was the representation of the evil spies. Caleb, however, encouraged them to go forward, though seconded by Joshua only. He does not say, Let us go up and conquer it; but, Let us go and possess it. Difficulties that are in the way of salvation, dwindle and vanish before a lively, active faith in the power and promise of God. All things are possible, if they are promised, to him that believes; but carnal sense and carnal professors are not to be trusted. Unbelief overlooks the promises and power of God, magnifies every danger and difficulty, and fills the heart with discouragement. May the Lord help us to believe! we shall then find all things possible.

CHAPTER 14

The people murmur at the account of the spies. (1-4) Joshua and Caleb labor to still the people. (5-10) The Divine threatenings, The intercession of Moses. (11-19) The murmurers forbidden to enter the promised land. (20-35) Death of the evil spies. (36-39) Defeat of the people, who now would invade the land. (40-45)

Numbers 14:1

Vs. 1-4: Those who do not trust God, continually vex themselves. The sorrow of the world worketh death. The Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron, and in them reproached the Lord. They look back with causeless discontent. See the madness of unbridled passions, which makes men prodigal of what nature accounts most dear, life itself. They wish rather to die criminals under God's justice, than to live conquerors in his favor. At last they resolve, that, instead of going forward to Canaan, they would go back to Egypt. Those who walk not in God's counsels, seek their own ruin. Could they expect that God's cloud would lead them, or his manna attend them? Suppose the difficulties of conquering Canaan were as they imagined, those of returning to Egypt were much greater. We complain of our place and lot, and we would change; but is there any place or condition in this world, that has not something in it to make us uneasy, if we are disposed to be so? The way to better our condition, is to get our spirits in a better frame. See the folly of turning from the ways of God. But men run on the certain fatal consequences of a sinful course.

Numbers 14:5

Vs. 5-10: Moses and Aaron were astonished to see a people throw away their own mercies. Caleb and Joshua assured the people of the goodness of the land. They made nothing of the difficulties in the way of their gaining it. If men were convinced of the desirableness of the gains of religion, they would not stick at the services of it. Though the Canaanites dwell in walled cities, their defense was departed from them. The other spies took notice of their strength, but these of their wickedness. No people can be safe, when they have provoked God to leave them. Though Israel dwell in tents, they are fortified. While we have the presence of God with us, we need not

fear the most powerful force against us. Sinners are ruined by their own rebellion. But those who, like Caleb and Joshua, faithfully expose themselves for God, are sure to be taken under his special protection, and shall be hid from the rage of men, either under heaven or in heaven.

Numbers 14:11

Vs. 11-19: Moses made humble intercession for Israel. Herein he was a type of Christ, who prayed for those that despitefully used him. The pardon of a nation's sin, is the turning away the nation's punishment; and for that Moses is here so earnest. Moses argued that, consistently with God's character, in his abundant mercies, he could forgive them.

Numbers 14:20

Vs. 20-35: The Lord granted the prayer of Moses so far as not at once to destroy the congregation. But disbelief of the promise forbids the benefit. Those who despise the pleasant land shall be shut out of it. The promise of God should be fulfilled to their children. They wished to die in the wilderness; God made their sin their ruin, took them at their word, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. They were made to groan under the burden of their own sin, which was too heavy for them to bear. Ye shall know my breach of promise, both the causes of it, that it is procured by your sin, for God never leaves any till they first leave him; and the consequences of it, that will produce your ruin. But your little ones, now under twenty years old, which ye, in your unbelief, said should be a prey, them will I bring in. God will let them know that he can put a difference between the guilty and the innocent, and cut them off without touching their children. Thus God would not utterly take away his loving kindness.

Numbers 14:36

Vs. 36-39: Here is the sudden death of the ten evil spies. They sinned in bringing a slander upon the land of promise. Those greatly provoke God, who misrepresent religion, raise dislike in men's minds toward it, or give opportunity to those to do so, who seek occasion. Justly are murmurers made mourners. If they had mourned for the sin, when they were faithfully reproved, the sentence had been prevented; but as they mourned for the judgment only, it did them no service. There is in hell such mourning as this; but tears will not quench the flames, nor cool the tongue.

Numbers 14:40

Vs. 40-45: Some of the Israelites were now earnest to go forward toward Canaan. But it came too late. If men would but be as earnest for heaven while their day of grace lasts, as they will be when it is over, how well would it be for them! That which has been duty in its season, when mistimed, may be turned into sin. Those who are out of the way of their duty, are not under God's protection, and go at their peril. God bade them go, and they would not; he forbade them, and they would go. Thus is the carnal mind enmity against God. They had distrusted God's strength; they now presume upon their own without his. And the expedition fails accordingly; now the sentence began to be executed, that their carcasses should fall in the wilderness. That affair can never end well, which begins with sin. The way to obtain peace with our friends, and success against our enemies, is, to have God, as our Friend, and to keep in his love. Let us take warning from the fate of Israel, lest we perish after the same example of unbelief. Let us go forth, depending on God's mercy, power, promise, and truth; he will be with us, and bring our souls to everlasting rest.

CHAPTER 15

The law of the meat-offering and the drink-offering, The stranger under the same law. (1-21) The sacrifice for the sin of ignorance. (22-29) The punishment of presumption, The Sabbath-breaker stoned. (30-36) The law for fringes on garment. (37-41)

<0151> Numbers 15:1

Vs. 1-21: Full instructions are given about the meat-offerings and drink-offerings. The beginning of this law is very encouraging, When ye come into the land of your habitation which I give unto you. This was a plain intimation that God would secure the promised land to their seed. It was requisite, since the sacrifices of acknowledgment were intended as the food of God's table, that there should be a constant supply of bread, oil, and wine, whatever the flesh-meat was. And the intent of this law is to direct the proportions of the meat-offering and drink-offering. Natives and strangers are placed on a level in this as in other like matters. It was a happy forewarning of the calling of the Gentiles, and of their admission into the church. If the law made so little difference between Jew and Gentile, much less would the gospel, which broke down the partition-wall, and reconciled both to God.

<0152> Numbers 15:22

Vs. 22-29: Though ignorance will in a degree excuse, it will not justify those who might have known their Lord's will, yet did it not. David prayed to be cleansed from his secret faults, those sins which he himself was not aware of. Sins committed ignorantly, shall be forgiven through Christ the great Sacrifice, who, when he offered up himself once for all upon the cross, seemed to explain one part of the intention of his offering, in that prayer, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. It looked favorably upon the Gentiles, that this law of atoning for sins of ignorance, is expressly made to extend to those who were strangers to Israel.

Numbers 15:30

Vs. 30-36: Those are to be reckoned presumptuous sinners, who sin designedly against God's will and glory. Sins thus committed are exceedingly sinful. He that thus breaks the commandment reproaches the Lord. He also despises the word of the Lord. Presumptuous sinners despise it, thinking themselves too great, too good, and too wise, to be ruled by it. A particular instance of presumption in the sin of Sabbath-breaking is related. The offense was gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, to make a fire, whereas the people were to bake and seethe what they had occasion for, the day before, ^{Exodus 16:23}. This was done as an affront both to the law and to the Lawgiver. God is jealous for the honor of his Sabbaths, and will not hold him guiltless who profanes them, whatever men may do. God intended this punishment for a warning to all, to make conscience of keeping holy the Sabbath. And we may be assured that no command was ever given for the punishment of sin, which, at the judgment day, shall not prove to have come from perfect love and justice. The right of God to a day of devotion to himself, will be disputed and denied only by such as listen to the pride and unbelief of their hearts, rather than to the teaching of the Spirit of truth and life. Wherein consists the difference between him who was detected gathering sticks in the wilderness on the day of God, and the man who turns his back upon the blessings of Sabbath appointments, and the promises of Sabbath mercies, to use his time, his cares, and his soul, in heaping up riches; and waste his hours, his property, and his strength in sinful pleasure? Wealth may come by the unhallowed effort, but it will not come alone; it will have its awful reward. Sinful pursuits lead to ruin.

Numbers 15:37

Vs. 37-41: The people are ordered by the Lord to make fringes on the borders of their garments. The Jews were distinguished from their neighbors in their dress, as well as in their diet, and thus taught not to be conformed to the way of the heathen in other things. They proclaimed themselves Jews wherever they were, as not ashamed of God and his law. The fringes were not appointed for trimming and adorning their clothes, but to stir up their minds by way of remembrance, ^{2 Peter 3:1}. If they were tempted to sin, the fringe would warn them not to break God's

commandments. We should use every means of refreshing our memories with the truths and precepts of God's word, to strengthen and quicken our obedience, and arm our minds against temptation. Be holy unto your God; cleansed from sin, and sincerely devoted to his service; and that great reason for all the commandments is again and again repeated, "I am the Lord your God."

CHAPTER 16

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; Korah contends for the priesthood. (1-11) Disobedience of Dathan and Abiram. (12-15) The glory of the Lord appears; The intercession of Moses and Aaron. (16-22) The earth swallows up Dathan and Abiram. (23-34) The company of Korah consumed. (35-40) The people murmur; A plague sent. (41-50)

Numbers 16:1

Vs. 1-11: Pride and ambition occasion a great deal of mischief both in churches and states. The rebels quarrel with the settlement of the priesthood upon Aaron and his family. Small reason they had to boast of the people's purity, or of God's favor, as the people had been so often and so lately polluted with sin, and were now under the marks of God's displeasure. They unjustly charge Moses and Aaron with taking honor to themselves; whereas they were called of God to it. See here,

1. What spirit levelers are of; those who resist the powers God has set over them.
2. What usage even the best and most useful men may expect, even from those to whom they have been serviceable.

Moses sought instruction from God. The heart of the wise studies to answer, and asks counsel of God. Moses shows their privileges as Levites, and convicts them of the sin of undervaluing these privileges. It will help to keep us from envying those above us, duly to consider how many there are below us.

Numbers 16:12

Vs. 12-15: Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram to bring their complaints; but they would not obey. They bring very false charges against Moses. Those often fall under the heaviest censures, who in truth deserve the highest praise. Moses, though the meekest man, yet, finding God reproached in him, was very wroth; he could not bear to see the people ruining themselves. He appeals to God as to his own integrity. He

bade them appear with Aaron next morning, at the time of offering the morning incense. Korah undertook thus to appear. Proud ambitious men, while projecting their own advancement, often hurry on their own shameful fall.

Numbers 16:16

Vs. 16-22: The same glory of the Lord that appeared to place Aaron in his office at first, ^(B22)Leviticus 9:23, now appeared to confirm him in it; and to confound those who set up against him. Nothing is more terrible to those who are conscious of guilt, than the appearance of the Divine glory. See how dangerous it is to have fellowship with sinners, and to partake with them. Though the people had treacherously deserted them, yet Moses and Aaron approved themselves faithful shepherds of Israel. If others fail in their duty to us, that does not take away the obligations we are under to seek their welfare. Their prayer was a pleading prayer, and it proved a prevailing one.

Numbers 16:23

Vs. 23-34: The seventy elders of Israel attend Moses. It is our duty to do what we can to countenance and support lawful authority when it is opposed. And those who would not perish with sinners, must come out from among them, and be separate. It was in answer to the prayer of Moses, that God stirred up the hearts of the congregation to remove for their own safety. Grace to separate from evil-doers is one of the things that accompany salvation. God, in justice, left the rebels to the obstinacy and hardness of their own hearts. Moses, by Divine direction, when all Israel were waiting the event, declares that if the rebels die a common death, he will be content to be called and counted an impostor. As soon as Moses had spoken the word, God caused the earth to open and swallow them all up. The children perished with their parents; in which, though we cannot tell how bad they might be to deserve it, or how good God might be otherwise to them; yet of this we are sure, that Infinite Justice did them no wrong. It was altogether miraculous. God has, when he pleases, strange punishments for the workers of iniquity. It was very significant. Considering how the earth is still in like manner loaded with the weight of man's sins, we have reason to wonder that it does not now sink under its load. The ruin of others should be our warning. Could we, by faith, hear

the outcries of those that are gone down to the bottomless pit, we should give more diligence than we do to escape for our lives, lest we also come into their condemnation.

Numbers 16:35

Vs. 35-40: A fire went out from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense, while Aaron, who stood with them, was preserved alive. God is jealous of the honor of his own institutions, and will not have them invaded. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. The censers are devoted, and, as all devoted things, must be made serviceable to the glory of God. This covering of the altar would remind the children of Israel of this event, that others might hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously. They brought destruction on themselves both in body and soul. Thus all who break the law and neglect the gospel choose and love death.

Numbers 16:41

Vs. 41-50: The gaping earth was scarcely closed, before the same sins are again committed, and all these warnings slighted. They called the rebels the people of the Lord; and find fault with Divine justice. The obstinacy of Israel notwithstanding the terrors of God's law, as given on mount Sinai, and the terrors of his judgments, shows how necessary the grace of God is to change men's hearts and lives. Love will do what fear cannot. Moses and Aaron interceded with God for mercy, knowing how great the provocation was. Aaron went, and burned incense between the living and the dead, not to purify the air, but to pacify an offended God. As one tender of the life of every Israelite, Aaron made all possible speed. We must render good for evil. Observe especially, that Aaron was a type of Christ. There is an infection of sin in the world, which only the cross and intercession of Jesus Christ can stay and remove. He enters the defiled and dying camp. He stands between the dead and the living; between the eternal Judge and the souls under condemnation. We must have redemption through His blood, even the remission of sins. We admire the ready devotion of Aaron: shall we not bless and praise the unspeakable grace and love which filled the Saviors heart, when he placed himself in our stead, and bought us with his life? Greatly indeed hath God commended his love

towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,
~~CHR~~ Romans 5:8.

CHAPTER 17

Twelve rods laid up before the Lord. (1-7) Aaron's rod buds, and is kept for a memorial. (8-13)

<QUOTE Numbers 17:1

Vs. 1-7: It is an instance of the grace of God, that, having wrought divers miracles to punish sin, he would work one more to prevent it. Twelve rods or staves were to be brought in. It is probable that they were the staves which the princes used as ensigns of their authority; old dry staves, that had no sap in them. They were to expect that the rod of the tribe, or prince, whom God chose to the priesthood, should bud and blossom. Moses did not object that the matter was sufficiently settled already; he did not undertake to determine it; but left the case before the Lord.

<QUOTE Numbers 17:8

Vs. 8-13: While all the other rods remained as they were. Aaron's rod became a living branch. In some places there were buds, in others blossoms, in others fruit, at the same time; all this was miraculous. Thus Aaron was manifested to be under the special blessing of Heaven. Fruitfulness is the best evidence of a Divine call; and the plants of God's setting, and the boughs cut off them, will flourish. This rod was preserved, to take away the murmurings of the people, that they might not die. The design of God, in all his providences, and in the memorials of them, is to take away sin. Christ was manifested to take away sin. Christ is expressly called a rod out of the stem of Jesse: little prospect was there, according to human views, that he should ever flourish. But the dry rod revived and blossomed to the confusion of his adversaries. The people cry, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish! This was the language of a repining people, quarreling with the judgments of God, which by their own pride and obstinacy they brought upon themselves. It is very wicked to fret against God when we are in affliction, and in our distress thus to trespass yet more. If we die, if we perish, it is of ourselves, and the blame will be upon our own heads. When God judges, he will overcome, and will oblige the most obstinate gainsayers to confess their folly. And how great are our

mercies, that we have a clearer and a better dispensation, established upon better promises!

CHAPTER 18

The charge of the priests and Levites. (1-7) The priests' portion. (8-19) The Levites' portion. (20-32)

Numbers 18:1

Vs. 1-7: The people complained of their difficulty and peril in drawing near to God. God here gives them to understand, that the priests should come near for them. Aaron would see reason not to be proud of his preferment, when he considered the great care and charge upon him. Be not high-minded, but fear. The greater the trust of work and power that is committed to us, the greater danger there is of betraying that trust. This is a good reason why we should neither envy others' honors, nor desire high places.

Numbers 18:8

Vs. 8-19: All believers are spiritual priests, and God has promised to take care of them. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is. And from the provision here made for the priests, the apostle shows that it is the duty of Christian churches to maintain their ministers. Scandalous maintenance makes scandalous ministers. The priests were to be wholly devoted to their ministry, not diverted from it, or disturbed in it, by worldly care or business. Also, that they might be examples of living by faith, not only in God's providence, but in his ordinances. The best should be offered for the first-fruits unto the Lord. Those who think to save, by putting God off with the refuse, deceive themselves, for God is not mocked.

Numbers 18:20

Vs. 20-32: As Israel was a people not to be numbered among the nations, so Levi was a tribe to be distinguished from the rest. Those who have God for their Inheritance and their Portion for ever, ought to look with holy contempt and indifference upon the possessions of this world. The Levites were to give God his dues out of their tithes, as well as the Israelites out of

their increase. See, in ver. 31, the way to have comfort in all our worldly possessions, so as to bear no sin by reason of them.

- 1.** We must be sure that what we have is got honestly and in the service of God. That meat is best eaten which is first earned; but if any will not work, neither shall he eat, ^{<5100>}2 Thessalonians 3:10.
- 2.** We must be sure that God has his dues out of it. We have the comfort of our substance, when we have honored the Lord with it. Ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved the best from it. We should give alms of such things as we have, that all may be holy and comfortable to us.

CHAPTER 19

The ashes of a heifer. (1-10) Used to purify the unequaled. (11-22)

Numbers 19:1

Vs. 1-10: The heifer was to be wholly burned. This typified the painful sufferings of our Lord Jesus, both in soul and body, as a sacrifice made by fire, to satisfy God's justice for man's sin. These ashes are said to be laid up as a purification for sin, because, though they were only to purify from ceremonial unequaled, yet they were a type of that purification for sin which our Lord Jesus made by his death. The blood of Christ is laid up for us in the word and sacraments, as a fountain of merit, to which by faith we may have constant recourse, for cleansing our consciences.

Numbers 19:11

Vs. 11-22: Why did the law make a corpse a defiling thing? Because death is the wages of sin, which entered into the world by it, and reigns by the power of it. The law could not conquer death, nor abolish it, as the gospel does, by bringing life and immortality to light, and so introducing a better hope. As the ashes of the heifer signified the merit of Christ, so the running water signified the power and grace of the blessed Spirit, who is compared to rivers of living water; and it is by his work that the righteousness of Christ is applied to us for our cleansing. Those who promise themselves benefit by the righteousness of Christ, while they submit not to the grace and influence of the Holy Spirit, do but deceive themselves; we cannot be purified by the ashes, otherwise than in the running water. What use could there be in these appointments, if they do not refer to the doctrines concerning the sacrifice of Christ? But comparing them with the New Testament, the knowledge to be got from them is evident. The true state of villainy man is shown in these institutions. Here we learn the defiling nature of sin, and are warned to avoid evil communications.

CHAPTER 20

The people come to Zin, They murmur for water, Moses directed to smite the rock, The infirmity of Moses and Aaron. (1-13) The Israelites are refused a passage through Edom. (14-21) Aaron reigns the priest's office to Eleazar, and dies in mount Hor. (22-29)

Numbers 20:1

Vs. 1-13: After thirty-eight years' tedious abode in the wilderness, the armies of Israel advanced towards Canaan again. There was no water for the congregation. We live in a wanting world, and wherever we are, must expect to meet with something to put us out. It is a great mercy to have plenty of water, a mercy which, if we found the want of, we should more own the worth of. Hereupon they murmured against Moses and Aaron. They spake the same absurd and brutish language their fathers had done. It made their crime the worse, that they had smarted so long for the discontent and distrusts of their fathers, yet they venture in the same steps. Moses must again, in God's name, command water out of a rock for them; God is as able as ever to supply his people with what is needful for them. But Moses and Aaron acted wrong. They took much of the glory of this work of wonder to themselves; "Must we fetch water?" As if it were done by some power or worthiness of their own. They were to speak to the rock, but they smote it. Therefore it is charged upon them, that they did not sanctify God, that is, they did not give to him alone that glory of this miracle which was due unto his name. And being provoked by the people, Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips. The same pride of man would still usurp the office of the appointed Mediator; and become to ourselves wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Such a state of sinful independence, such a rebellion of the soul against its Savior, the voice of God condemns in every page of the gospel.

Numbers 20:14

Vs. 14-21: The nearest way to Canaan from the place where Israel encamped, was through the country of Edom. The ambassadors who were sent returned with a denial. The Edomites feared to receive damage by the Israelites. And had this numerous army been under any other discipline

than that of the righteous God himself, there might have been cause for this jealousy. But Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing; and now the hatred revived, when the blessing was about to be inherited. We must not think it strange, if reasonable requests be denied by unreasonable men, and if those whom God favors be affronted by men.

Numbers 20:22

Vs. 22-29: God bids Aaron prepare to die. There is something of displeasure in these orders. Aaron must not enter Canaan, because he had failed in his duty at the waters of strife. There is much of mercy in them. Aaron, though he dies for his transgression, dies with ease, and in honor. He is gathered to his people, as one who dies in the arms of Divine grace. There is much significancy in these orders. Aaron must not enter Canaan, to show that the Levitical priesthood could make nothing perfect; that must be done by bringing in a better hope. Aaron submits, and dies in the method and manner appointed; and, for ought that appears, with as much cheerfulness as if he had been going to bed. It was a great satisfaction to Aaron to see his son, who was dear to him, preferred; and his office preserved and secured: especially, to see in this a figure of Christ's everlasting priesthood. A good man would desire, if it were the will of God, not to outlive his usefulness. Why should we covet to continue any longer in this world, than while we may do some service in it for God and our generation?

CHAPTER 21

The Canaanites of Arad destroyed. (1-3) The people murmuring, are plagued with fiery serpents, They repenting, are healed through the brazen serpent. (4-9) Further journeys of the Israelites. (10-20) Sihon and Og overcome, Their land possessed. (21-35)

Numbers 21:1

Vs. 1-3: Before the people began their march round the country of Edom, the king of Arad, a Canaanite, who inhabited the southern part of the country, attacked them in the wilderness, and took some prisoners. This was to lead the Israelites to look more thoroughly to the Lord.

Numbers 21:4

Vs. 4-9: The children of Israel were wearied by a long march round the land of Edom. They speak discontentedly of what God had done for them, and distrustfully of what he would do. What will they be pleased with, whom manna will not please? Let not the contempt which some cast on the word of God, make us value it less. It is the bread of life, substantial bread, and will nourish those who by faith feed upon it, to eternal life, whoever may call it light bread. We see the righteous judgment God brought upon them for murmuring. He sent fiery serpents among them, which bit or stung many to death. It is to be feared that they would not have owned the sin, if they had not felt the smart; but they relent under the rod. And God made a wonderful provision for their relief. The Jews themselves say it was not the sight of the brazen serpent that cured; but in looking up to it, they looked up to God as the Lord that healed them. There was much gospel in this. Our Savior declared, ⁸⁰⁸⁴John 3:14,15, that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish. Compare their disease and ours. Sin bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Compare the application of their remedy and ours. They looked and lived, and we, if we believe, shall not perish. It is by faith that we look unto Jesus, ⁸⁰²⁰Hebrews 12:2. Whosoever looked, however desperate his case, or feeble his sight, or distant his place, was certainly and perfectly cured. The Lord can relieve us from dangers and distresses, by means which human

reason never would have devised. Oh that the venom of the old serpent, inflaming men's passions, and causing them to commit sins which end in their eternal destruction, were as sensibly felt, and the danger as plainly seen, as the Israelites felt pain from the bite of the fiery serpents, and feared the death which followed! Then none would shut their eyes to Christ, or turn from his gospel. Then a crucified Savior would be so valued, that all things else would be accounted loss for him; then, without delay, and with earnestness and simplicity, all would apply to him in the appointed way, crying, Lord, save us; we perish! Nor would any abuse the freeness of Christ's salvation, while they reckoned the price which it cost him.

Numbers 21:10

Vs. 10-20: We have here the removes of the children of Israel, till they came to the plains of Moab, from whence they passed over Jordan into Canaan. The end of their pilgrimage was near. "They set forward." It were well if we did thus; and the nearer we come to heaven, were so much the more active and abundant in the work of the Lord. The wonderful success God granted to his people, is here spoken of, and, among the rest, their actions on the river Arnon, at Vaheb in Suphah, and other places on that river. In every stage of our lives, nay, in every step, we should notice what God has wrought for us; what he did at such a time, and what in such a place, ought to be distinctly remembered. God blessed his people with a supply of water. When we come to heaven, we shall remove to the well of life, the fountain of living waters. They received it with joy and thankfulness, which made the mercy doubly sweet. With joy must we draw water out of the wells of salvation, ^{<21>}Isaiah 12:3. As the brazen serpent was a figure of Christ, who is lifted up for our cure, so is this well a figure of the Spirit, who is poured forth for our comfort, and from whom flow to us rivers of living waters, ^{<41>}John 7:38,39. Does this well spring up in our souls? If so, we should take the comfort to ourselves, and give the glory to God. God promised to give water, but they must open the ground. God's favors must be expected in the use of such means as are within our power, but still the power is only of God.

Numbers 21:21

Vs. 21-35: Sihon went with his forces against Israel, out of his own borders, without provocation, and so ran upon his own ruin. The enemies of God's church often perish by the counsels they think most wisely taken. Og, king of Bashan, instead of being warned by the fate of his neighbors, to make peace with Israel, makes war with them, which proves in like manner his destruction. Wicked men do their utmost to secure themselves and their possessions against the judgments of God; but all in vain, when the day comes on which they must fall. God gave Israel success, while Moses was with them, that he might see the beginning of the glorious work, though he must not live to see it finished. This was, in comparison, but as the day of small things, yet it was an earnest of great things. We must prepare for fresh conflicts and enemies. We must make no peace or truce with the powers of darkness, nor even treat with them; nor should we expect any pause in our contest. But, trusting in God, and obeying his commands, we shall be more than conquerors over every enemy.

CHAPTER 22

Balak's fear of Israel, He sends for Balaam. (1-14) Balaam goes to Balak. (15-21) The opposition to Balaam by the way. (22-35) Balaam and Balak meet. (36-41)

Numbers 22:1

Vs. 1-14: The king of Moab formed a plan to get the people of Israel cursed; that is, to set God against them, who had hitherto fought for them. He had a false notion, that if he could get some prophet to pray for evil upon them, and to pronounce a blessing upon himself and his forces, that then he should be able to deal with them. None had so great a reputation as Balaam; and Balak will employ him, though he send a great way for him. It is not known whether the Lord had ever spoken to Balaam, or by him, before this; though it is probable he had, and it is certain he did afterwards. Yet we have abundant proof that he lived and died a wicked man, an enemy to God and his people. And the curse shall not come upon us if there is not a cause, even though men utter it. To prevail with Balaam, they took the wages of unrighteousness, but God laid restraint upon Balaam, forbidding him to curse Israel. Balaam was no stranger to Israel's cause; so that he ought to have answered the messengers at once, that he would never curse a people whom God had blessed; but he takes a night's time to consider what he should do. When we parley with temptations, we are in great danger of being overcome. Balaam was not faithful in returning God's answer to the messengers. Those are a fair mark for Satan's temptation, who lessen Divine restraints; as if to go against God's law were only to go without his leave. The messengers also are not faithful in returning Balaam's answer to Balak. Thus many are abused by the flatteries of those about them, and are prevented from seeing their own faults and follies.

Numbers 22:15

Vs. 15-21: A second embassy was sent to Balaam. It were well for us, if we were as earnest and constant in prosecuting a good work, notwithstanding disappointments. Balak laid a bait, not only for Balaam's covetousness, but for his pride and ambition. How earnestly should we

beg of God daily to mortify such desires in us! Thus sinners stick at no pains, spare no cost, and care not how low they stoop, to gratify their luxury, or their malice. Shall we then be unwilling to do what is right? God forbid! Balaam's convictions charged him to keep to the command of God; nor could any man have spoken better. But many call God theirs, who are not his, not truly because not only his. There is no judging men by their words; God knows the heart. Balaam's corruptions at the same time unequaled him to go contrary to the command. He seemed to refuse the temptation; but he expressed no abhorrence of it. He had a strong desire to accept the offer, and hoped that God might give him leave to go. He had already been told what the will of God was. It is a certain evidence of the ruling of corruption in the heart, to beg leave to sin. God gave Balaam up to his own heart's lusts. As God sometimes denies the prayers of his people in love, so sometimes he grants the desires of the wicked in wrath.

Numbers 22:22

Vs. 22-35: We must not think, that because God does not always by his providence restrain men from sin, therefore he approves of it, or that it is not hateful to him. The holy angels oppose sin, and perhaps are employed in preventing it more than we are aware. This angel was an adversary to Balaam, because Balaam counted him his adversary; those are really our best friends, and we ought so to reckon them, who stop our progress in sinful ways. Balaam has notice of God's displeasure by the ass. It is common for those whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil, to push on violently, through the difficulties Providence lays in their way. The Lord opened the mouth of the ass. This was a great miracle wrought by the power of God. He who made man speak, could, when he pleased, make the ass to speak with man's voice. The ass complained of Balaam's cruelty. The righteous God does not allow the meanest or weakest to be abused; but they shall be able to speak in their own defense, or he will some way or other speak for them. Balaam at length has his eyes opened. God has many ways to bring down the hard and unhumiliated heart. When our eyes are opened, we shall see the danger of sinful ways, and how much it was for our advantage to be crossed. Balaam seemed to relent; I have sinned; but it does not appear that he was sensible of this wickedness of his heart, or willing to own it. If he finds he cannot go forward, he will be content, since there is no remedy, to go back. Thus many leave their sins, only

because their sins have left them. The angel declared that he should not only be unable to curse Israel, but should be forced to bless them: this would be more for the glory of God, and to his own confusion, than if he had turned back.

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Vs. 36-41: Balak has now nothing to complain of, but that Balaam did not come sooner. Balaam bids Balak not depend too much upon him. He seems to speak with vexation; but is really as desirous to please Balak, as ever he had pretended to be to please God. See what need we have to pray every day, Our Father which art in heaven, lead us not into temptation. Let us be jealous over our own hearts, seeing how far men may go in the knowledge of God, and yet come short of Divine grace.

CHAPTER 23

Balak's sacrifice, Balaam pronounces a blessing instead of a curse. (1-10) Balak's disappointment, and second sacrifice, Balaam again blesses Israel. (11-30)

Numbers 23:1

Vs. 1-10: With the camps of Israel full in view, Balaam ordered seven altars to be built, and a bullock and a ram to be offered on each. Oh the sottishness of superstition, to imagine that God will be at man's beck! The curse is turned into a blessing, by the overruling power of God, in love to Israel. God designed to serve his own glory by Balaam, and therefore met him. If God put a word into the mouth of Balaam, who would have defied God and Israel, surely he will not be wanting to those who desire to glorify God, and to edify his people; it shall be given what they should speak. He who opened the mouth of the ass, caused the mouth of this wicked man to speak words as contrary to the desire of his heart, as those of the ass were to the powers of the brute. The miracle was as great in the one case as in the other. Balaam pronounces Israel safe. He owns he could do no more than God suffered him to do. He pronounces them happy in their distinction from the rest of the nations. Happy in their numbers, which made them both honorable and formidable. Happy in their last end. Death is the end of all men; even the righteous must die, and it is good for us to think of this with regard to ourselves, as Balaam does here, speaking of his own death. He pronounces the righteous truly blessed, not only while they live, but when they die; which makes their death even more desirable than life itself. But there are many who desire to die the death of the righteous, but do not endeavor to live the life of the righteous; gladly would they have an end like theirs, but not a way like theirs. They would be saints in heaven, but not saints on earth. This saying of Balaam's is only a wish, not a prayer; it is a vain wish, being only a wish for the end, without any care for the means. Many seek to quiet their consciences with the promise of future amendment, or take up with some false hope, while they neglect the only way of salvation, by which a sinner can be righteous before God.

Numbers 23:11

Vs. 11-30: Balak was angry with Balaam. Thus a confession of God's overruling power is extorted from a wicked prophet, to the confusion of a wicked prince. A second time the curse is turned into a blessing; and this blessing is both larger and stronger than the former. Men change their minds, and break their words; but God never changes his mind, and therefore never recalls his promise. And when in Scripture he is said to repent, it does not mean any change of his mind; but only a change of his way. There was sin in Jacob, and God saw it; but there was not such as might provoke him to give them up to ruin. If the Lord sees that we trust in his mercy, and accept of his salvation; that we indulge no secret lust, and continue not in rebellion, but endeavor to serve and glorify him; we may be sure that he looks upon us as accepted in Christ, that our sins are all pardoned. Oh the wonders of providence and grace, the wonders of redeeming love, of pardoning mercy, of the new-creating Spirit! Balak had no hope of ruining Israel, and Balaam showed that he had more reason to fear being ruined by them. Since Balaam cannot say what he would have him, Balak wished him to say nothing. But though there are many devices in man's heart, God's counsels shall stand. Yet they resolve to make another attempt, though they had no promise on which to build their hopes. Let us, who have a promise that the vision at the end shall speak and not lie, continue earnest in prayer, ^{◀2311} Luke 18:1.

CHAPTER 24

Balaam, leaving divinations, prophesies the happiness of Israel. (1-9) Balak dismisses Balaam in anger. (10-14) Balaam's prophecies. (15-25)

Numbers 24:1

Vs. 1-9: Now Balaam spake not his own sense, but the language of the Spirit that came upon him. Many have their eyes open who have not their hearts open; are enlightened, but not sanctified. That knowledge which puffs men up with pride, will but serve to light them to hell, whither many go with their eyes open. The blessing is nearly the same as those given before. He admires in Israel, their beauty. The righteous, doubtless, is more excellencies than his neighbor. Their fruitfulness and increase. Their honor and advancement. Their power and victory. He looks back upon what had been done for them. Their courage and security. The righteous are bold as a lion, not when assaulting others, but when at rest, because God maketh them to dwell in safety. Their influence upon their neighbors. God takes what is done to them, whether good or evil, as done to himself.

Numbers 24:10

Vs. 10-14: This vain attempt to curse Israel is ended. Balak broke out into a rage against Balaam, and expressed great vexation. Balaam has a very full excuse; God restrained him from saying what he would have said, and constrained him to say what he would not have uttered.

Numbers 24:15

Vs. 15-25: Under the powerful influence of the Spirit of prophecy, Balaam foretold the future prosperity and extensive dominion of Israel. Balaam boasts that his eyes are open. The prophets were in old times called seers. He had heard the words of God, which many do who neither heed them, nor hear God in them. He knew the knowledge of the Most High. A man may be full of the knowledge of God, yet utterly destitute of the grace of God. He calls God the Most High and the Almighty. No man could seem to express a greater respect to God; yet he had no true fear of him, love to

him, nor faith in him; so far a man may go toward heaven, and yet come short of it at last. Here is Balaam's prophecy concerning Him who should be the crown and glory of his people Israel; who is David in the type; but our Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah, is chiefly pointed at, and of him it is an illustrious prophecy. Balaam, a wicked man, shall see Christ, but shall not see him nigh; not see him as Job, who saw him as his Redeemer, and saw him for himself. When he comes in the clouds, every eye shall see him; but many will see him, as the rich man in hell saw Abraham, afar off. He shall come out of Jacob, and Israel, as a Star and a Scepter; the former denoting his glory and lustre; the latter his power and authority. Christ shall be King, not only of Jacob and Israel, but of all the world; so that all shall be either governed by his golden scepter, or dashed in pieces by his iron rod. Balaam prophesied concerning the Amalekites and Kenites, part of whose country he had now in view. Even a nest in a rock will not be a lasting security. Here is a prophecy that looks as far forward as to the Greeks and Romans. He acknowledges all the revolutions of states and kingdoms to be the Lord's doing. These events will make such desolations, that scarcely any will escape. They that live then, will be as brands plucked out of the fire. May God fit us for the worst of times! Thus Balaam, instead of cursing the church, curses Amalek the first, and Rome the last enemy of the church. Not Rome pagan only, but Rome papal also; antichrist and all the antichristian powers. Let us ask ourselves, Do we in knowledge, experience, or profession, excellencies Balaam? No readiness of speech, even in preaching or prayer, no gifts of knowledge or prophecy, are in themselves different from, or superior to the boasted gifts of him who loved the wages of unrighteousness, and died the enemy of God. Simple dependence on the Redeemer's atoning blood and sanctifying grace, cheerful submission to the Divine will, constant endeavors to glorify God and benefit his people, these are less splendid, but far more excellencies gifts, and always accompany salvation. No boasting hypocrite ever possessed these; yet the feeblest believer has something of them, and is daily praying for more of them.

CHAPTER 25

*The Israelites enticed by the daughters of Moab and Midian. (1-5)
Phinehas puts Zimri and Cozbi to death. (6-15) The Midianites to
be punished. (16-18)*

Numbers 25:1

Vs. 1-5: The friendship of the wicked is more dangerous than their enmity; for none can prevail against God's people if they are not overcome by their inbred lusts; nor can any enchantment hurt them, but the enticements of worldly interests and pleasures. Here is the sin of Israel, to which they are enticed by the daughters of Moab and Midian. Those are our worst enemies who draw us to sin, for that is the greatest mischief any man can do us. Israel's sin did that which all Balaam's enchantments could not do; it set God against them. Diseases are the fruits of God's anger, and the just punishments of prevailing sins; one infection follows the other. Ringleaders in sin ought to be made examples of justice.

Numbers 25:6

Vs. 6-15: Phinehas, in the courage of zeal and faith, executed vengeance on Zimri and Cozbi. This act can never be an example for private revenge, or religious persecution, or for irregular public vengeance.

Numbers 25:16

Vs. 16-18: We read not that any Midianites died of the plague; God punished them with the sword of an enemy, not with the rod of a father. We must set ourselves against whatever is an occasion of sin to us, ^{<115>}Matthew 5:29, 30. Whatever draws us to sin, should be a vexation to us, as a thorn in the flesh. And none will be more surely and severely punished than those who, after Satan's example, and with his subtlety, tempt others to sin.

CHAPTER 26

Numbering of Israel in the plains of Moab. (1-51) The division of the land. (52-56) Number of the Levites. (57-62) None remaining of the first numbering. (63-65)

Numbers 26:1

Vs. 1-51: Moses did not number the people but when God commanded him. We have here the families registered, as well as the tribes. The total was nearly the same as when numbered at mount Sinai. Notice is here taken of the children of Korah; they died not, as the children of Dathan and Abiram; they seem not to have joined even their own father in rebellion. If we partake not of the sins of sinners, we shall not partake of their plagues.

Numbers 26:52

Vs. 52-56: In distributing these tribes, the general rule of equity is prescribed; that to many should be given more, and to fewer less. Though it seems left to the prudence of their prince, the matter at last must be settled by the providence of God, with which all must be satisfied.

Numbers 26:57

Vs. 57-62: Levi was God's tribe; therefore it was not numbered with the rest, but alone. It came not under the sentence, that none of them should enter Canaan excepting Caleb and Joshua.

Numbers 26:63

Vs. 63-65: The execution of the sentence passed on the murmurers, chap. 14:29, is observable. There was not one man numbered now, who was numbered then, but Caleb and Joshua. Here appeared the righteousness of God, and his faithfulness to his threatenings. Especially observe the truth of God, in performing his promise to Caleb and Joshua. Death makes awful havoc of the human species, and causes surprising changes in families and nations; yet all is appointed in perfect wisdom, justice, and truth, by the Lord himself. This should stir us up to think upon the hateful nature of sin, the cause of all these devastations. We should renew our

repentance, seek forgiveness, value the salvation of Christ, remember how frail we are, prepare for the summons of death, and fill up our days in serving our generation according to the will of God.

CHAPTER 27

The daughters of Zelophehad apply for an inheritance, The law of inheritances. (1-11) Moses warned of his death. (12-14) Joshua appointed to succeed Moses. (15-23)

Numbers 27:1

Vs. 1-11: The five daughters of Zelophehad considered themselves as left destitute, having neither father nor brother to inherit any land. Their believing expectation that the word of the Lord would be performed in due season, and their desire of an interest in the promised inheritance; and the modest, candid manner in which they asked, without secret murmurs or discontents, are a good example. They ask for a possession in the land of Canaan. Herein they discovered,

1. Strong faith in the power and promise of God, concerning the giving of the land of Canaan to Israel.
2. And earnest desire of a place and name in the land of promise, which was a type of heaven.
3. Respect and honor for their father, whose name was dear to them now he was gone.

He never had done any thing that might bar his children's claim. It is a comfort to parents when they come to die, if though they have smarted for their own sin, yet they are not conscious of any of those iniquities which God will visit on their children. God himself gives judgment. He takes notice of the affairs, not only of nations, but of private families, and orders them according to his will. The petition is granted. Those who seek an inheritance in the land of promise, shall have what they seek for, and other things shall be added to them.

Numbers 27:12

Vs. 12-14: Moses must die, but he shall have the satisfaction of seeing the land of promise. This sight of Canaan signified his believing prospect of the better country, that is, the heavenly. Moses must die, but death does

not cut him off; it only brings him to rest with the holy patriarchs. It is but to die as they died, having lived as they lived; and as their end was peace, why should we fear any evil in the passage of that dark valley?

Numbers 27:15

Vs. 15-23: Envious spirits do not love their successors; but Moses was not one of these. We should concern ourselves, both in our prayers and in our endeavors, for the rising generation, that religion may be maintained and advanced, when we are in our graves. God appoints a successor, even Joshua; who had signalized himself by his courage in fighting Amalek, his humility in ministering to Moses, and his faith and sincerity in witnessing against the report of the evil spies. This man God appoints to succeed Moses; a man in whom is the Spirit, the Spirit of grace. He is a good man, fearing God and hating covetousness, and acting from principle. He has the spirit of government; he is fit to do the work and discharge the trusts of his place. He has a spirit of conduct and courage; he had also the Spirit of prophecy. That man is not fully qualified for any service in the church of Christ, who is destitute of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, whatever human abilities he may possess. And in Joshua's succession we are reminded "that the law was given by Moses," who by reason of our transgression could not bring us to heaven; but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," for the salvation of every believer.

CHAPTER 28

Offerings, The daily sacrifice. (1-8) The offering on the Sabbath and new moons. (9-15) Offerings at the Passover, and on the day of first-fruits. (16-31)

Numbers 28:1

Vs. 1-8: God saw fit now to repeat the law of sacrifices. This was a new generation of men; and they were concerned to keep their peace with God when at war with their enemies. The daily sacrifice is called a continual burnt-offering; when we are bid to pray always, at least every morning and evening we should offer up solemn prayers and praises to God. Nothing is added here but that the wine poured out in the drink-offering is to be strong wine, to teach us to serve God with the best we have. It was a figure of the blood of Christ, the memorial of which is still left to the church in wine; and of the blood of the martyrs, which was poured out as a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of our faith, ^{<BIB>}Philippians 2:17.

Numbers 28:9

Vs. 9-15: Every Sabbath day, beside the two lambs offered for the daily burnt-offering, there must be two more offered. This teaches us to double our devotions on Sabbath days, for so the duty of the day requires. The Sabbath rest is to be observed, in order more closely to apply ourselves to the Sabbath work, which ought to fill up the Sabbath time. The offerings in the new moons showed thankfulness for the renewing of earthly blessings: when we rejoice in the gifts of providence, we must make the sacrifice of Christ, that great gift of special grace, the fountain and spring-head of our joy. And the worship performed in the new moons is made typical of gospel solemnities, ^{<BIB>}Isaiah 66:23. As the moon borrows light from the sun, and is renewed by its influences; so the church borrows her light from Jesus Christ, who is the Sun of righteousness, renewing the state of the church, especially under the gospel.

Numbers 28:16

Vs. 16-31: By the sacrifices enjoined in this chapter, we are reminded of the continued power of the sacrifice of Christ, and of our continual need to depend thereon. No hurrying employments, or perilous situations, or prosperous circumstances, should cause slackness in our religious exercises; but should rather stir us up to greater diligence in seeking help from, or giving thanks to the Lord. And all is to be accompanied with repentance, faith in the Lord Jesus, and love to him, and to produce true holiness in our conduct towards all men; otherwise God will abhor our most solemn services and abundant devotions. And Christ is able to supply the wants of every day, every week, every month, every year, every ordinance, every case.

CHAPTER 29

*The offering at the feast of trumpets, and on the day of atonement.
(1-11) Offerings at the feast of tabernacles. (12-40)*

Numbers 29:1

Vs. 1-11: There were more sacred solemnities in the seventh month than in any other. It was the space between harvest and seed-time. The more leisure we have from the pressing occupations of this life, the more time we should spend in the immediate service of God. The blowing of the trumpets was appointed, ⁽¹⁸²²⁾Leviticus 22:24. Here they are directed what sacrifices to offer on that day. Those who would know the mind of God in the Scriptures, must compare one part with another. The latter discoveries of Divine light explain what was dark, and supply what was wanting, in the former, that the man of God may be perfect.

Numbers 29:12

Vs. 12-40: Soon after the day of atonement, the day in which men were to afflict their souls, followed the feast of Tabernacles, in which they were to rejoice before the Lord. Their days of rejoicing were to be days of sacrifices. A disposition to be cheerful does us good, when it encourages our hearts in the duties of God's service. All the days of dwelling in booths they must offer sacrifices; while we are here in a tabernacle state, it is our interest, as well as our duty, constantly to keep up communion with God. The sacrifices for each of the seven days are appointed. Every day there must be a sin-offering, as in the other feasts. Our burnt-offerings of praise cannot be accepted of God, unless we have an interest in the great sacrifice which Christ offered, when he made himself a Sin-offering for us. And no extraordinary services should put aside stated devotions. Every thing here reminds us of our sinfulness. The life that we live in the flesh must be by the faith of the Son of God; until we go to be with him, to behold his glory, and praise his mercy, who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. To whom be honor and glory for ever. Amen.

CHAPTER 30

Vows to be kept. (1, 2) The cases wherein vows might be released.
(3-16)

Numbers 30:1

Vs. 1, 2: No man can be bound by his own promise to do what he is already, by the Divine precept, forbidden to do. In other matters the command is, that he shall not break his words, though he may change his mind.

Numbers 30:3

Vs. 3-16: Two cases of vows are determined. The case of a daughter in her father's house. When her vow comes to his knowledge, it is in his power either to confirm it or do it away. The law is plain in the case of a wife. If her husband allows her vow, though only by silence, it stands. If he disallows it, her obligation to her husband takes place of it; for to him she ought to be in subjection, as unto the Lord. The Divine law consults the good order of families. It is fit that every man should bear rule in his own house, and have his wife and children in subjection; rather than that this great rule should be broken, or any encouragement be given to inferior relations to break those bonds asunder, God releases the obligation even of a solemn vow. So much does religion secure the welfare of all societies; and in it the families of the earth have a blessing.

CHAPTER 31

War with Midian. (1-6) Balaam slain. (7-12) Those slain who caused sin. (13-38) Purification of the Israelites. (39-24) Division of the spoil. (25-47) Offerings. (48-54)

Numbers 31:1

Vs. 1-6: All who, without commission from God, dare to execute private revenge, and who, from ambition, covetousness, or resentment, wage war and desolate kingdoms, must one day answer for it. But if God, instead of sending an earthquake, a pestilence, or a famine, be pleased to authorize and command any people to avenge his cause, such a commission surely is just and right. The Israelites could show such a commission, though no persons now can do so. Their wars were begun and carried on expressly by Divine direction, and they were enabled to conquer by miracles. Unless it can be proved that the wicked Canaanites did not deserve their doom, objectors only prove their dislike to God, and their love to his enemies. Man makes light of the evil of sin, but God abhors it. This explains the terrible executions of the nations which had filled the measure of their sins.

Numbers 31:7

Vs. 7-12: The Israelites slew the Kings of Midian. They slew Balaam. God's overruling providence brought him thither, and their just vengeance found him. Had he himself rightly believed what he had said of the happy state of Israel, he would not have thus herded with the enemies of Israel. The Midianites' wicked wives were Balaam's projects: it was just that he should perish with them, ²³⁴⁰⁵ Hosea 4:5. They took the women and children captives. They burnt their cities and castles, and returned to the camp.

Numbers 31:13

Vs. 13-18: The sword of war should spare women and children; but the sword of justice should know no distinction, but that of guilty or not guilty. This war was the execution of a righteous sentence upon a guilty nation, in which the women were the worst criminals. The female children were spared, who, being brought up among the Israelites, would not tempt

them to idolatry. The whole history shows the hatefulness of sin, and the guilt of tempting others; it teaches us to avoid all occasions of evil, and to give no quarter to inward lusts. The women and children were not kept for sinful purposes, but for slaves, a custom every where practiced in former times, as to captives. In the course of providence, when famine and plagues visit a nation for sin, children suffer in the common calamity. In this case parents are punished in their children; and for children dying before actual sin, full provision is made as to their eternal happiness, by the mercy of God in Christ.

Numbers 31:19

Vs. 19-24: The Israelites had to purify themselves according to the law, and to abide without the camp seven days, though they had not contracted any moral guilt, the war being just and lawful, and commanded by God. Thus God would preserve in their minds a dread and detestation of shedding blood. The spoil had been used by Midianites, and being now come into the possession of Israelites, it was fit that it should be purified.

Numbers 31:25

Vs. 25-47: Whatever we have, God justly claims a part. Out of the people's share God required one in fifty, but out of the soldiers' share only one in five hundred. The less opportunity we have of honoring God with personal services, the more should we give in money or value.

Numbers 31:48

Vs. 48-54: The success of the Israelites had been very remarkable, so small a company overcoming such multitudes, but it was still more wonderful that not one was slain or missing. They presented the gold they found among the spoils, as an offering to the Lord. Thus they confessed, that instead of claiming a reward for their service, they needed forgiveness of much that had been amiss, and desired to be thankful for the preservation of their lives, which might justly have been taken away.

CHAPTER 32

The tribes of Reuben and Gad request an inheritance on the east of Jordan. (1-5) Moses reproves the Reubenites and Gadites. (6-15) They explain their views, Moses consents. (16-27) They take possession of the land to the east of Jordan. (28-42)

Numbers 32:1

Vs. 1-5: Here is a proposal made by the Reubenites and Gadites, that the land lately conquered might be allotted to them. Two things common in the world might lead these tribes to make this choice; the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. There was much amiss in the principle they went upon; they consulted their own private convenience more than the public good. Thus to the present time, many seek their own things more than the things of Jesus Christ; and are led by worldly interests and advantages to take up short of the heavenly Canaan.

Numbers 32:6

Vs. 6-15: The proposal showed disregard to the land of Canaan, distrust of the Lord's promise, and unwillingness to encounter the difficulties and dangers of conquering and driving out the inhabitants of that land. Moses is wroth with them. It ill becomes any of God's Israel to sit down unconcerned about the difficult and perilous concerns of their brethren, whether public or personal. He reminds them of the fatal consequences of the unbelief and faint-heartedness of their fathers, when they were, as themselves, just ready to enter Canaan. If men considered as they ought what would be the end of sin, they would be afraid of the beginning of it.

Numbers 32:16

Vs. 16-27: Here is the good effect of plain dealing. Moses, by showing their sin, and the danger of it, brought them to their duty, without murmuring or disputing. All men ought to consider the interests of others as well as their own; the law of love requires us to labor, venture, or suffer for each other as there may be occasion. They propose that their men of war should go ready armed before the children of Israel into the land of

Canaan, and that they should not return till the conquest of Canaan was ended. Moses grants their request, but he warns them of the danger of breaking their word. If you fail, you sin against the Lord, and not against your brethren only; God will certainly reckon with you for it. Be sure your sin will find you out. Sin will surely find out the sinner sooner or later. It concerns us now to find our sins out, that we may repent of them, and forsake them, lest they find us out to our ruin.

Numbers 32:28

Vs. 28-42: Concerning the settlement of these tribes, observe, that they built the cities, that is, repaired them. They changed the names of them; probably they were idolatrous, therefore they should be forgotten. A spirit of selfishness, of seeking our own, not the things of Christ, when each one ought to assist others, is as dangerous as it is common. It is impossible to be sincere in the faith, sensible of the goodness of God, constrained by the love of Christ, sanctified by the power of the Holy Ghost, and yet be indifferent to the progress of religion, and the spiritual success of others, through love of ease, or fear of conflict. Let then your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

CHAPTER 33

Encampments of the Israelites. (1-49) The Canaanites to be destroyed. (50-56)

Numbers 33:1

Vs. 1-49: This is a brief review of the travels of the children of Israel through the wilderness. It is a memorable history. In their travels towards Canaan they were continually on the remove. Such is our state in this world; we have here no continuing city, and all our removes in this world are but from one part a desert to another. They were led to and fro, forward and backward, yet were all the while under the direction of the pillar of cloud and fire. God led them about, yet led them the right way. The way God takes in bringing his people to himself is always the best way, though it does not always seem to us the nearest way. Former events are mentioned. Thus we ought to keep in mind the providences of God concerning us and families, us and our land, and the many instances of that Divine care which has led us, and fed us, and kept us all our days hitherto. Few periods of our lives can be thought upon, without reminding us of the Lord's goodness, and our own ingratitude and disobedience: his kindness leaves us without excuse for our sins. We could not wish to travel over again the stages we have passed, unless we could hope, by the grace of God, to shun the sins we then committed, and to embrace such opportunities of doing good as we have let slip. Soon will our wanderings end, and our eternal state be fixed beyond recall; how important then is the present moment! Happy are those whom the Lord now guides with his counsel, and will at length receive to his glory. To this happiness the gospel calls us. Behold now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Let sinners seize the opportunity, and flee for refuge to the hope set before them. Let us redeem our time, to glorify God and serve our generation; and he will carry us safely through all, to his eternal kingdom.

Numbers 33:50

Vs. 50-56: Now that they were to pass over Jordan, they were entering again into temptation to follow idols; and they are threatened that, if they spared either the idols or the idolaters, their sin would certainly be their

punishment. They would foster vipers in their own bosoms. The remnant of the Canaanites, if they made any peace with them, though but for a time, would be pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides. We must expect trouble and affliction from whatever sin we indulge; that which we are willing should tempt us, will vex us. It was intended that the Canaanites should be put out of the land; but if the Israelites learned their wicked ways, they also would be put out. Let us hear this and fear. If we do not drive out sin, sin will drive us out. If we are not the death of our lusts, our lusts will be the death of our souls.

CHAPTER 34

The bounds of the promised land. (1-15) Those appointed to divide the land. (16-29)

Numbers 34:1

Vs. 1-15: Canaan was of small extent; as it is here bounded, it is but about 160 miles in length, and about 50 in breadth; yet this was the country promised to the father of the faithful, and the possession of the seed of Israel. This was that little spot of ground, in which alone, for many ages, God was known. This was the vineyard of the Lord, the garden unequalled; but as it is with gardens and vineyards, the narrowness of the space was made up by the fruitfulness of the soil. Though the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, yet few know him, and serve him; but those few are happy, because fruitful to God. Also, see how little a share of the world God gives to his own people. Those who have their portion in heaven, have reason to be content with a small pittance of this earth. Yet a little that a righteous man has, having it from the love of God, and with his blessing, is far better and more comfortable than the riches of many wicked.

Numbers 34:16

Vs. 16-29: God here appoints men to divide the land to them. So sure must they feel of victory and success while God fought for them, that the persons are named who should be entrusted with the dividing of the land.

CHAPTER 35

The cities of the Levites. (1-8) The cities of refuge, The laws about murder. (9-34)

Numbers 35:1

Vs. 1-8: The cities of the priests and Levites were not only to accommodate them, but to place them, as religious teachers, in several parts of the land. For though the typical service of the tabernacle or temple was only in one place, the preaching of the word of God, and prayer and praise, were not thus confined. These cities were to be given out of each tribe. Each thus made a grateful acknowledgment to God. Each tribe had the benefit of the Levites dwelling amongst them, to teach them the knowledge of the Lord; thus no parts of the country were left to sit in darkness. The gospel provides that he who is taught in the word, should communicate to him that teaches, in all good things, ^{<REF>}Galatians 6:6. We are to free God's ministers from distracting cares, and to leave them at leisure for the duties of their station; so that they may be wholly employed therein, and avail themselves of every opportunity, by acts of kindness, to gain the goodwill of the people, and to draw their attention.

Numbers 35:9

Vs. 9-34: To show plainly the abhorrence of murder, and to provide the more effectually for the punishment of the murderer, the nearest relation of the deceased, under the title of avenger of blood, (or the redeemer of blood,) in notorious cases, might pursue, and execute vengeance. A distinction is made, not between sudden anger and malice aforethought, both which are the crime of murder; but between intentionally striking a man with any weapon likely to cause death, and an unintentional blow. In the latter case alone, the city of refuge afforded protection. Murder in all its forms, and under all disguises, pollutes a land. Alas! that so many murders, under the name of duels, prize-fights, etc. should pass unpunished. There were six cities of refuge; one or other might be reached in less than a day's journey from any part of the land. To these, man-slayers might flee for refuge, and be safe, till they had a fair trial. If acquitted from the charge, they were protected from the avenger of blood;

yet they must continue within the bounds of the city till the death of the high priest. Thus we are reminded that the death of the great High Priest is the only means whereby sins are pardoned, and sinners set at liberty. These cities are plainly alluded to, both in the Old and New Testament, we cannot doubt the typical character of their appointment. Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope, saith the voice of mercy, ^{<3012>}Zechariah 9:12, alluding to the city of refuge. St. Paul describes the strong consolation of fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us, in a passage always applied to the gracious appointment of the cities of refuge, ^{<3018>}Hebrews 6:18. The rich mercies of salvation, through Christ, prefigured by these cities, demand our regard.

- 1.** Did the ancient city rear its towers of safety on high? See Christ raised up on the cross; and is he not exalted at the right hand of his Father, to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins?
- 2.** Does not the highway of salvation, resemble the smooth and plain path to the city of refuge? Survey the path that leads to the Redeemer. Is there any stumbling-block to be found therein, except that which an evil heart of unbelief supplies for its own fall?
- 3.** Waymarks were set up pointing to the city. And is it not the office of the ministers of the gospel to direct sinners to Him?
- 4.** The gate of the city stood open night and day. Has not Christ declared, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?
- 5.** The city of refuge afforded support to every one who entered its walls. Those who have reached the refuge, may live by faith on Him whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed.
- 6.** The city was a refuge for all. In the gospel there is no respect of persons. That soul lives not which deserves not Divine wrath; that soul lives not which may not in simple faith hope for salvation and life eternal, through the Son of God.

CHAPTER 36

The inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad. (1-4) The daughters of Zelophehad are to marry in their own tribe. (5-12) Conclusion. (13)

Numbers 36:1

Vs. 1-4: The heads of the tribe of Manasseh represent the evil which might follow, if the daughters of Zelophehad should marry into any other tribes. They sought to preserve the Divine appointment of inheritances, and that contests and quarrels should not rise among those who should come afterwards. It is the wisdom and duty of those who have estates in the world, to settle them, and to dispose of them, so that no strife and contention may arise.

Numbers 36:5

Vs. 5-12: Those who consult the oracles of God, concerning the making of their heavenly inheritance sure, shall not only be directed what to do, but their inquiries shall be graciously accepted. God would not have one tribe enriched at the expense of another. Each tribe was to keep to its own inheritance. The daughters of Zelophehad submitted to this appointment. How could they fail to marry well, when God himself directed them? Let the people of God learn how suitable and proper it is, like the daughters of Israel, to be united only to their own people. Ought not every true believer in Jesus, to be very attentive in the near and tender relations of life, to be united only to such as are united to the Lord? All our intentions and unequaled ought to be subjected to the will of God, when that is made known to us, and especially in contracting marriage. Although the word of God allows affection and preference in this important relation, it does not sanction that foolish, ungovernable, and idolatrous passion, which cares not what may be the end; but in defiance of authority, determines upon self-gratification. All such conduct, however disguised, is against common sense, the interests of society, the happiness of the marriage relation, and, what is still more evil, against the religion of Christ.

Numbers 36:13

Vs. 13: These are the judgments the Lord commanded in the plains of Moab. Most of them related to the settlement in Canaan, into which the Israelites were now entering. Whatever new condition God, by his providence, brings us into, we must beg him to teach us the duties of it, and to enable us to do them, that we may do the work of the day in its day, the duty of a place in its place.