

## **66 Kindles of Matthew Henry Commentary**

Buy all the 66 Kindles for \$2.99 on a secure website

**THE BIG BOOK OF CHRISTIAN QUOTES Kindle Edition**

**Let's Celebrate Advent Every Day!: Through Practicing God's Presence! Kindle Edition**

Practicing The Presence Of God — The Best Rule of Holy Life Kindle Edition

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/BrokenByHim>

Let's Celebrate Advent Every Day!: Through Practicing God's Presence! Kindle Edition

**More books you might be interested in checking out**

**The Art of Prophesying with The Calling of the Ministry**

MEMORIES OF PATMOS: A Study Of The Apocalypse & Exposition Of The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

**A Lamp Unto My Feet:366 Bible Verses & Prayers - Tools for the Believer's Daily Renewal [Kindle Edition] \$1.49**  
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00AUN6DC6>

**Practicing The Presence Of God \$0.99**

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00DJYQSDC/>

**The Sinful Desires Of The Flesh! \$1.49**

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Sinful-Desires-Flesh-ebook/dp/B00EEPZAN4/>

**Copyright © 2014** Public Domain Work

Kindle edited by: M. J. Andre  
Fearless Eagle Publishing, Toronto, Ontario

**Table of Contents**

**No table of contents entries found.**

## Preface

The titles of the five books of Moses, which we use in our Bibles, are all borrowed from the Greek translation of the Seventy, the most ancient version of the Old Testament that we know of. But the title of this book only we turn into English; in all the rest we retain the Greek word itself, for which difference I know no reason but that the Latin translators have generally done the same. Otherwise this book might as well have been called *Arithmoi*, the Greek title, as the first *Genesis*, and the second *Exodus*; or these might as well have been translated, and called, the first the *Generation*, or *Original*, the second the *Out-let*, or *Escape*, as this *Numbers*.—This book was thus entitled because of the numbers of the children of Israel, so often mentioned in this book, and so well worthy to give a title to it, because it was the remarkable accomplishment of God's promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. It also relates to two numberings of them, one at mount Sinai (ch. 1), the other in the plains of Moab, thirty-nine years after (ch. 26). And not three men the same in the last account that were in the first. The book is almost equally divided between histories and laws, intermixed.

We have here, I. The histories of the numbering and marshalling of the tribes (ch. 1-4), the dedication of the altar and Levites (ch. 7, 8), their march (ch. 9, 10), their murmuring and unbelief, for which they were sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness (ch. 11-14), the rebellion of Korah (ch. 16, 17), the history of the last year of the forty (ch. 20-26), the conquest of Midian, and the settlement of the two tribes (ch. 31, 32), with an account of their journeys (ch. 33), II. Divers laws about the Nazarites, etc. (ch. 5, 6); and again about the priests' charge, etc. (ch. 18, 19), feasts (ch. 28, 29), and vows (ch. 30), and relating to their settlement in Canaan (ch. 27, 34, 35, 36). An abstract of much of this book we have in a few words in Ps. 95:10, *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*; and an application of it to ourselves in Heb. 4:1, *Let us fear lest we seem to come short*. Many considerable nations there were now in being, that dwelt in cities and fortified towns, of which no notice is taken, no account kept, by the sacred history: but very exact records are kept of the affairs of a handful of people, that dwelt in tents, and wandered strangely in a wilderness, because they were the children of the covenant. *For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance*

## Chapter 1

Israel was now to be formed into a commonwealth, or rather a kingdom; for "the Lord was their King" (1 Sa. 12:12), their government a theocracy, and Moses under him was king in Jeshurun, Deu. 33:5. Now, for the right settlement of this holy state, next to the institution of good laws was necessary the institution of good order; and account therefore must be taken of the subjects of this kingdom, which is done in this chapter, where we have, I. Orders given to Moses to number the people (v. 1-4). II. Persons nominated to assist him herein (v. 5-16). III. The particular number of each tribe, as it was given in to Moses (v. 17-43). IV. The sum total of all together (v. 44-46). V. An exception of the Levites (v. 47, etc.).

### Verses 1-16

I. We have here a commission issued out for the numbering of the people of Israel; and David, long after, paid dearly for doing it without a commission. Here is,

1. The date of this commission, v. 1. (1.) The place: it is given at God's court *in the wilderness of Sinai*, from his royal palace, *the tabernacle of the congregation*. (2.) The time: *In the second year* after they came up out of Egypt; we may call it the second year of that reign. The laws in Leviticus were given in the first month of that year; these orders were given in the beginning of the second month.

2. The directions given for the execution of it, v. 2, 3. (1.) None were to be numbered but the males, and those only such as were fit for war. None *under twenty years old*; for, though some such might have bulk and strength enough for military service, yet, in compassion to their tender years, God would not have them put upon it to bear arms. (2.) Nor were any to be numbered who through age, or bodily infirmity, blindness, lameness, or chronical diseases, were unfit for war. The church being militant, those only are reputed the true members of it that have enlisted themselves soldiers of Jesus Christ; for our life, our Christian life, is a warfare. (3.) The account was to be taken *according to their families*, that it might not only be known how many they were, and what were their names, but of what tribe and family, or clan, nay, of what particular house every person was; or, reckoning it the muster of an army, to what regiment every man belonged, that he might know his place himself and the government might know where to find him. They were numbered a little before this, when their poll-money was paid for the service of the tabernacle, Ex. 38:25, 26. But it should seem they were not then registered *by the house of their fathers*, as now they were. Their number was the same then that it was now: 603,550 men; for as many as had died since then, and were lost in the account, so many had arrived to be twenty years old, and were added to the account. Note, *As one generation passeth away another generation cometh*. As vacancies are daily made, so recruits are daily raised to fill up the vacancies, and Providence takes care that, one time or other, in one place or other, the births shall balance the burials, that the race of mankind and the holy seed may not be cut off and become extinct.

3. Commissioners are named for the doing of this work. Moses and Aaron were to preside (v. 3), and one man of every tribe, that was renowned in his tribe, and was presumed to know it well, was to assist in it—*the princes of the tribes*, v. 16. Note, Those that are honourable should study to be serviceable; he that is great, let him be your minister, and show, by his knowing

the public, that he deserves to be publicly known. The charge of this muster was committed to him who was the lord-lieutenant of that tribe. Now,

II. Why was this account ordered to be taken and kept? For several reasons. 1. To prove the accomplishment of the promise made to Abraham, that God would *multiply his seed exceedingly*, which promise was renewed to Jacob (Gen. 28:14), that *his seed should be as the dust of the earth*. Now it appears that there did not fail one tittle of that good promise, which was an encouragement to them to hope that the other promise of the land of Canaan for an inheritance should also be fulfilled in its season. When the number of a body of men is only guessed at, upon the view, it is easy for one that is disposed to cavil to surmise that the conjecture is mistaken, and that, if they were to be counted, they would not be found half so many; therefore God would have Israel numbered, that it might be upon record how vastly they were increased in a little time, that the power of God's providence and the truth of his promise may be seen and acknowledged by all. It could not have been expected, in any ordinary course of nature, that seventy-five souls (which was the number of Jacob's family when he went down into Egypt) should in 215 years (and it was no longer) multiply into so many hundred thousands. It is therefore to be attributed to an extraordinary virtue in the divine promise and blessing. 2. It was to intimate the particular care which God himself would take of his Israel, and which Moses and the inferior rulers were expected to take of them. God is called the *Shepherd of Israel*, Ps. 80:1. Now the shepherds always kept count of their flocks, and delivered them by number to their under-shepherds, that they might know if any were missing; in like manner God numbers his flock, that of all which he took into his fold he might lose none but upon a valuable consideration, even those that were sacrificed to his justice. 3. It was to put a difference between the true born Israelites and the mixed multitude that were among them; none were numbered but Israelites: all the world is but lumber in comparison with those jewels. Little account is made of others, but the saints God has a particular property in and concern for. *The Lord knows those that are his* (2 Tim. 2:19), *knows them by name*, Phil, 4:3. The hairs of their head are numbered ; but he will say to others, *"I never knew you, never made any account of you."* 4. It was in order to their being marshalled into several districts, for the more easy administration of justice, and their more regular march through the wilderness. It is a rout and a rabble, not an army, that is not mustered and put in order.

### **Verses 17-43**

We have here the speedy execution of the orders given for the numbering of the people. It was begun the same day that the orders were given, *The first day of the second month*; compare v. 18 with v. 1. Note, When any work is to be done for God it is good to set about it quickly, while the sense of duty is strong and pressing. And, for aught that appears, it was but one day's work, for many other things were done between this and the twentieth day of this month, when they removed their camp, ch. 10:11. Joab was almost ten months numbering the people in David's time (2 Sa. 24:8); but then they were dispersed, now they lived closely together; then Satan proposed the doing of it, now God commanded it. It was the sooner and more easily done now because it had been done but a little while ago, and they needed but review the old books, with the alterations since made, which probably they had kept an account of as they occurred.

In the particulars here left upon record, we may observe, 1. That the numbers are registered in words at length (as I may say),

and not in figures; to every one of the twelve tribes it is repeated, for the greater ceremony and solemnity of the account, that they were numbered *by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names*, to show that every tribe took and gave in the account by the same rule and in the same method, though so many hands were employed in it, setting down the genealogy first, to show that their family descended from Israel, then the families themselves in their order, then dividing each family into the houses, or subordinate families, that branched from it, and under these the names of the particular persons, according to the rules of heraldry. Thus every man might know who were his relations or next of kin, on which some laws we have already met with did depend: besides that the nearer any are to us in relation the more ready we should be to do them good. 2. That they all end with hundreds, only Gad with fifty (v. 25), but none of the numbers descend to units or tens. Some think it was a special providence that ordered all the tribes just at this time to be even numbers, and no odd or broken numbers among them, to show them that there was something more than ordinary designed in their increase, there being this uncommon in the circumstance of it. It is rather probable that Moses having some time before appointed rulers of hundreds, and rulers of fifties (Ex. 18:25), they numbered the people by their respective rulers, which would bring the numbers to even hundreds or fifties. 3. That Judah is the most numerous of them all, more than double to Benjamin and Manasseh, and almost 12,000 more than any other tribe, v. 27. It was Judah whom *his brethren must praise* because from him Messiah the Prince was to descend; but, because that was a thing at a distance, God did in many ways honour that tribe in the mean time, particularly by the great increase of it, for his sake who was to spring out of Judah (Heb. 7:14) in the fulness of time. Judah was to lead the van through the wilderness, and therefore was furnished accordingly with greater strength than any other tribe. 4. Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, are numbered as distinct tribes, and both together made up almost as many as Judah; this was in pursuance of Jacob's adoption of them, by which they were equalled with their uncles Reuben and Simeon, Gen. 48:5. It was also the effect of the blessing of Joseph, who was to be a *fruitful bough*, Gen. 49:22. And Ephraim the younger is put first, and is more numerous than Manasseh, for Jacob had crossed hands, and foreseen ten thousands of Ephraim and thousands of Manasseh. The fulfilling of this confirms our faith in the spirit of prophecy with which the patriarchs were endued. 5. When they came down into Egypt Dan had but one son (Gen. 46:23), and so his tribe was but one family, ch. 26:42. Benjamin had then ten sons (Gen. 46:21), yet now the tribe of Dan is almost double in number to that of Benjamin. Note, The increasing and diminishing of families do not always go by probabilities. Some are multiplied greatly, and again are diminished, while others that were poor have families made them like a flock, Ps. 107:38, 39, 41; and see Job 12:23. 6. It is said of each of the tribes that those were numbered who were able to go forth to war, to remind them that they had wars before them, though now they were in peace and met with no opposition. *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast as though he had put it off.*

#### **Verses 44-46**

We have here the sum total at the foot of the account; they were in all 600,000 fighting men, and 3550 over. Some think that when this was their number some months before (Ex. 38:26) the Levites were reckoned with them, but now that tribe was separated for the service of God, yet so many more had by this time attained to the age of twenty years as that still they were

the same number, to show that whatever we part with for the honour and service of God it shall certainly be made up to us one way or other. Now we see what a vast body of men they were. Let us consider, 1. How much went to maintain all these (besides twice as many more, no question, of women and children, sick and aged, and the mixed multitude) for forty years together in the wilderness; and they were all at God's finding every day, having their food from the dew of heaven, and not from the fatness of the earth. O what a great and good housekeeper is our God, that has such numbers depending on him and receiving from him every day! 2. What work sin makes with a people; within forty years most of them would indeed have died of course for the common sin of mankind; for, when sin entered into the world, death came with it, and how great are the desolations which it makes in the earth! But, for the particular sin of unbelief and murmuring, all those that were now numbered, except two, laid their bones under their iniquity, and perished in the wilderness. 3. What a great multitude God's spiritual Israel will amount to at last; though at one time, and in one place, they seem to be but a little flock, yet when they come all together they shall be a great multitude, innumerable, Rev. 7:9. And, though the church's beginning be small, its latter end shall greatly increase. A little one shall become a thousand.

#### **Verses 47-54**

Care is here taken to distinguish from the rest of the tribes the tribe of Levi, which, in the matter of the golden calf, had distinguished itself, Ex. 32:26. Note, Singular services shall be recompensed with singular honours. Now,

I. It was the honour of the Levites that they were made guardians of the spiritualities; to them was committed the care of the tabernacle and the treasures thereof, both in their camps and in their marches. 1. When they moved the Levites were to take down the tabernacle, to carry it and all that belonged to it, and then to set it up again in the place appointed, v. 50, 51. It was for the honour of the holy things that none should be permitted to see them, or touch them, but those only who were called of God to the service. Thus we all are unfit and unworthy to have fellowship with God until we are first 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, are made *priests to our God*; and it is promised that God would take Levites to himself, even from the Gentiles, Isa. 66:21. 2. When they rested the Levites were to *encamp round about the tabernacle* (v. 50, 53), that they might be near their work, and resident upon their charge, always ready to attend, and that they might be a guard upon the tabernacle, to preserve it from being either plundered or profaned. They must pitch round about the tabernacle, *that there be no wrath upon the congregation*, as there would be if the tabernacle and the charge of it were neglected, or those crowded upon it that were not allowed to come near. Note, Great care must be taken to prevent sin, because the preventing of sin is the preventing of wrath.

II. It was their further honour that as Israel, being a holy people, was not *reckoned among the nations*, so they, being a holy tribe, were not reckoned among other Israelites, but numbered afterwards by themselves, v. 49. The service which the Levites were to do about the sanctuary is called (as we render it in the margin) a *warfare*, ch. 4:23. And, being engaged in that warfare, they were discharged from military services, and therefore not numbered with those that were to *go out to war*. Note, Those that minister about holy things should neither entangle themselves, nor be entangled, in secular affairs. The ministry is itself work enough for a whole man, and all little enough to be employed in it. It is an admonition to ministers to distinguish

themselves by their exemplary conversation from common Israelites, not affecting to seem greater, but aiming to be really better, every way better than others.

## Chapter 2

The thousands of Israel, having been mustered in the former chapter, in this are marshalled, and a regular disposition is made of their camp, by a divine appointment. Here is, I. A general order concerning it (v. 1, 2). II. Particular directions for the posting of each of the tribes, in four distinct squadrons, three tribes in each squadron. 1. In the van-guard on the east were posted Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun (v. 3-9). 2. In the right wing, southward, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad (v. 10-16). 3. In the rear, westward, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, (v. 18-24). 4. In the left wing, northward, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali (v. 25-31). 5. The tabernacle in the centre (v. 17). III. The conclusion of this appointment (v. 32, etc.).

### Verses 1-2

Here is the general appointment given both for their orderly encampment where they rested and their orderly march when they moved. Some order, it is possible, they had observed hitherto; they came out of Egypt in rank and file (Ex. 13:18), but now they were put into a better model. 1. They all dwelt in tents, and when they marched carried all their tents along with them, for *they found no city to dwell in*, Ps. 107:4. This represents to us our state in this world. It is a movable state (we are here to-day and gone to-morrow); and it is a military state: is not our life a warfare? We do but pitch our tents in this world, and have in it no continuing city. Let us, therefore, while we are pitching in this world, be pressing through it. 2. Those of a tribe were to pitch together, *every man by his own standard*. Note, It is the will of God that mutual love and affection, converse and communion, should be kept up among relations. Those that are of kin to each other should, as much as they can, be acquainted with each other; and the bonds of nature should be improved for the strengthening of the bonds of Christian communion. 3. Every one must know his place and keep in it; they were not allowed to fix where they pleased, nor to remove when they pleased, but God quarters them, with a charge to abide in their quarters. Note, It is God that *appoints us the bounds of our habitation*, and to him we must refer ourselves. *He shall choose our inheritance for us* (Ps. 47:4), and in his choice we must acquiesce, and not love to flit, nor be *as the bird that wanders from her nest*. 4. Every tribe had its standard, flag, or ensign, and it should seem every family had some particular ensign of their father's house, which was carried as with us the colours of each troop or company in a regiment are. These were of use for the distinction of tribes and families, and the gathering and keeping of them together, in allusion to which the preaching of the gospel is said to *lift up an ensign, to which the Gentiles shall seek*, and by which they shall pitch, Isa. 11:10, 12. Note, God is the God of order, and not of confusion. These standards made this mighty army seem more beautiful to its friends and more formidable to its enemies. The church of Christ is said to be as *terrible as an army with banners*, Cant. 6:10. It is uncertain how these standards were distinguished: some conjecture that the standard of each tribe was of the same colour with the precious stone in which the name of that tribe was written in the high priest's ephod, and that this was all the difference. Many of the modern Jews think there was some coat of arms painted in each standard, which had reference to the blessing of that tribe by Jacob. Judah bore a lion, Dan a serpent, Naphtali a hind, Benjamin a wolf, etc. Some of them say the four principal standards were, Judah a lion, Reuben a man, Joseph an ox, and Dan an eagle, making the appearances in Ezekiel's vision to allude it. Others say the name of each tribe was written in its standard.

Whatever it was, no doubt it gave a certain direction. 5. They were to pitch about the tabernacle, which was to be in the midst of them, as the tent of pavilion of a general in the centre of an army. They must encamp round the tabernacle, (1.) That it might be equally a comfort and joy to them all, as it was a token of God's gracious presence with them. Ps. 46:5, *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.* Their camp had reason to be hearty, when thus they had God in the heart of them. To have bread from heaven every day round about their camp, and fire from heaven, with other tokens of God's favour, in the midst of their camp, was abundantly sufficient to answer that question, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not? Happy art thou, O Israel!* It is probable that the doors of all their tents were made to look towards the tabernacle from all sides, for every Israelite should have his eyes always towards the Lord; therefore they worshipped at the tent-door. The tabernacle was in the midst of the camp, that it might be near to them; for it is a very desirable thing to have the solemn administrations of holy ordinances near us and within our reach. *The kingdom of God is among you.* (2.) That they might be a guard and defence upon the tabernacle and the Levites on every side. No invader could come near God's tabernacle without first penetrating the thickest of their squadrons. Note, If God undertake the protection of our comforts, we ought in our places to undertake the protection of his institutions, and stand up in defence of his honour, and interest, and ministers. 6. Yet they were to pitch afar off, in reverence to the sanctuary, that it might not seem crowded and thrust up among them, and that the common business of the camp might be no annoyance to it. They were also taught to keep their distance, lest too much familiarity should breed contempt. It is supposed (from Joshua 3:4) that the distance between the nearest part of the camp and the tabernacle (or perhaps between them and the camp of the Levites, who pitched near the tabernacle) was 2000 cubits, that is, 1000 yards, little more than half a measured mile with us; but the outer parts of the camp must needs be much further off. Some compute that the extent of their camp could be no less than twelve miles square; for it was like a movable city, with streets and lanes, in which perhaps the manna fell, as well as on the outside of the camp, that they might have it at their doors. In the Christian church we read of a throne (as in the tabernacle there was a mercy-seat) which is called a *glorious high throne from the beginning* (Jer. 17:12), and that throne surrounded by spiritual Israelites, twenty-four elders, double to the number of the tribes, *clothed in white raiment* (Rev. 4:4), and the banner over them is *Love*; but we are not ordered, as they were, to pitch afar off; no, we are invited to draw near, and come boldly. The saints of the Most High are said to be *round about him*, Ps. 76:11. God by his grace keep us close to him!

#### **Verses 3-34**

We have here the particular distribution of the twelve tribes into four squadrons, three tribes in a squadron, one of which was to lead the other two. Observe, 1. God himself appointed them their place, to prevent strife and envy among them. Had they been left to determine precedence among themselves, they would have been in danger of quarrelling with one another (as the disciples who strove *which should be greatest*); each would have had a pretence to be first, or at least not to be last. Had it been left to Moses to determine, they would have quarrelled with him, and charged him with partiality; therefore God does it, who is himself the fountain and judge of honour, and in his appointment all must acquiesce. If God in his providence advance others above us, and abase us, we ought to be as well satisfied in his doing it in that way as if he did it, as this was done here, by a

voice out of the tabernacle; and this consideration, that it appears to be the will of God it should be so, should effectually silence all envies and discontents. And as far as our place comes to be our choice our Saviour has given us a rule in Lu. 14:8, *Sit not down in the highest room;* and another in Mt. 20:27, *He that will be chief, let him be your servant.* Those that are most humble and most serviceable are really most honourable. 2. Every tribe had a captain, a prince, or commander-in-chief, whom God himself nominated, the same that had been appointed to number them, ch. 1:5. Our being all the children of one Adam is so far from justifying the levellers, and taking away the distinction of place and honour, that even among the children of the same Abraham, the same Jacob, the same Judah, God himself appointed that one should be captain of all the rest. There are *powers ordained of God*, and those to whom honour and fear are due and must be paid. Some observe the significancy of the names of these princes, at least, in general, how much God was in the thoughts of those that gave them their names, for most of them have *El, God*, at one end or other of their names. *Nethaneel, the gift of God; Eliab, my God a Father; Elizur, my God a rock; Shelumiel, God my peace; Eliasaph, God has added; Elishama, my God has heard; Gamaliel, God my reward; Pagiel, God has met me.* By this it appears that the Israelites in Egypt did not quite forget the name of their God, but, when they wanted other memorials, preserved the remembrance of it in the names of their children, and therewith comforted themselves in their affliction. 3. Those tribes were placed together under the same standard that were nearest of kin to each other; Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, were the three younger sons of Leah, and they were put together; and Issachar and Zebulun would not grudge to be under Judah, since they were his younger brethren. Reuben and Simeon would not have been content in their place. Therefore Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, is made chief of the next squadron; Simeon, no doubt, is willing to be under him, and Gad, the son of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, is fitly added to them in Levi's room: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, are all the posterity of Rachel. Dan, the eldest son of Bilhah, is made a leading tribe, though the son of a concubine, that more abundant honour might be bestowed on that which lacked; and it was said, *Dan should judge his people*, and to him were added two younger sons of the handmaids. Thus unexceptionable was the order in which they were placed. 4. The tribe of Judah was in the first post of honour, encamped towards the rising sun, and in their marches led the van, not only because it was the most numerous tribe, but chiefly because from that tribe Christ was to come, who is the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*, and was to descend from the loins of him who was now nominated chief captain of that tribe. Nahshon is reckoned among the ancestors of Christ, Mt. 1:4. So that, when he went before them, Christ himself went before them in effect, as their leader. Judah was the first of the twelve sons of Jacob that was blessed. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, were censured by their dying father; he therefore being first in blessing, though not in birth, is put first, to teach children how to value the smiles of their godly parents and dread their frowns. 5. The tribes of Levi pitched closely about the tabernacle, within the rest of their tribes, v. 17. They must defend the sanctuary, and then the rest of the tribes must defend them. Thus, in the vision which John saw of the glory of heaven, between the elders and the throne were four *living creatures full of eyes*, Rev. 4:6, 8. Civil powers should protect the religious interests of a nation, and be a defence upon that glory. 6. The camp of Dan (and so that tribe is called long after their settlement in Canaan (Jdg. 13:25), because celebrated for their military prowess), though posted in the left wing when they encamped, was ordered in their march to bring up the rear, v. 31. They were the most numerous, next to Judah, and

therefore were ordered into a post which, next to the front, required the most strength, for as the strength is so shall the day be. *Lastly*, The children of Israel observed the orders given them, and did *as the Lord commanded Moses*, v. 34. They put themselves in the posts assigned them, without murmuring or disputing, and, as it was their safety, so it was their beauty; Balaam was charmed with the sight of it: *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* ch. 24:5. Thus the gospel church, called the *camp of saints*, 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*, Col. 2:5.

### Chapter 3

This chapter and the next are concerning the tribe of Levi, which was to be mustered and marshalled by itself, and not in common with the other tribes, intimating the particular honour put upon them and the particular duty and service required from them. The Levites are in this chapter considered, I. As attendants on, and assistants to, the priests in the temple-service. And so we have an account, 1. Of the priests themselves (v. 1-4) and their work (v. 10). 2. Of the gift of the Levites to them (v. 5-9), in order to which they are mustered (v. 14-16), and the sum of them taken (v. 39). Each particular family of them is mustered, has its place assigned and its charge, the Gershonites (v. 17-26), the Kohathites (v. 27-32), the Merarites (v. 33-39). II. As equivalents for the first-born (v. 11-13). 1. The first-born are numbered, and the Levites taken instead of them, as far as the number of the Levites went (v. 40-45). 2. What first-born there were more than the Levites were redeemed (v. 46, etc.).

#### Verses 1-13

Here, I. The family of Aaron is confirmed in the priests' office, v. 10. They had been called to it before, and consecrated; here they are appointed to *wait on their priests' office*: the apostle uses this phrase (Rom. 12:7), *Let us wait on our ministry*. The office of the ministry requires a constant attendance and great diligence; so frequent are the returns of its work, and yet so transient its favourable opportunities, that it must be waited on. Here is repeated what was said before (ch. 1:51): *The stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death*, which forbids the invading of the priest's office by any other person whatsoever; none must come nigh to minister but Aaron and his sons only, all others are strangers. It also lays a charge on the priests, as door-keepers in God's house, to take care that none should come near who were forbidden by the law; they must keep off all intruders, whose approach would be to the profanation of the holy things, telling them that if they came near it was at their peril, they would *die by the hand of God*, as Uzza did. The Jews say that afterwards there was hung over the door of the temple a golden sword (perhaps alluding to that flaming sword at the entrance of the garden of Eden), on which was engraven, *The stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death*.

II. A particular account is given of this family of Aaron; what we have met with before concerning them is here repeated. 1. The consecration of the sons of Aaron, v. 3. They were all anointed to minister before the Lord, though it appeared afterwards, and God knew it, that two of them were wise and two were foolish. 2. The fall of the two elder (v. 4): they *offered strange fire*, and died for so doing, *before the Lord*. This is mentioned here in the preamble to the law concerning the priesthood, for a warning to all succeeding priests; let them know, by this example, that God is a jealous God, and will not be mocked; the holy anointing oil was an honour to the obedient, but not a shelter to the disobedient. It is here said, *They had no children*, Providence so ordering it, for their greater punishment, that none of their descendants should remain to be priests, and so bear up their name who had profaned God's name. 3. The continuance of the two younger: Eleazar and Ithamar ministered *in the sight of Aaron*. It intimates, (1.) The care they took about their ministrations not to make any blunders; they kept under their father's eye, and took instruction from him in all they did, because, probably, Nadab and Abihu got out of their father's sight when they offered strange fire. Note, It is good for young people to act under the direction and inspection of those that are aged

and experienced. (2.) The comfort Aaron took in it; it pleased him to see his younger sons behave themselves prudently and gravely, when his two elder had miscarried. Note, It is a great satisfaction to parents to *see their children walk in the truth*, 3 Jn. 4.

III. A grant is made of the Levites to be assistants to the priests in their work: *Give the Levites to Aaron*, v. 9. Aaron was to have a greater propriety in, and power over, the tribe of Levi than any other of the tribes had in and over their respective tribes. There was a great deal of work belonging to the priests' office, and there were now only three pairs of hands to do it all, Aaron's and his two sons'; for it does not appear that they had either of them any children at this time, at least not any that were of age to minister, therefore God appoints the Levites to attend upon them. Note, Those whom God finds work for his will find help for. Here is, 1. The service for which the Levites were designed: they were to *minister to the priests* in their ministration to the Lord (v. 6), and to *keep Aaron's charge* (v. 7), as the deacons to the bishops in the evangelical constitution, serving at tables, while the bishops waited on their ministry. The Levites killed the sacrifices, and then the priests needed only to sprinkle the blood and burn the fat: the Levites prepared the incense, the priests burnt it. They were to keep, not only Aaron's charge, but the *charge of the whole congregation*. Note, It is a great trust that is reposed in ministers, not only for the glory of Christ, but for the good of his church; so that they must not only keep the charge of the great high priest, but must also be faithful to the souls of men, in trust for whom a dispensation is committed to them. 2. the consideration upon which the Levites were demanded; they were taken instead of the first-born. The preservation of the first-born of Israel, when all the first-born of the Egyptians (with whom they were many of them mingled) were destroyed, was looked upon by him who never makes any unreasonable demands as cause sufficient of the appropriating of all the first-born thenceforward to himself (v. 13): *All the first-born are mine*. That was sufficient to make them his, though he had given no reason for it, for he is the sole fountain and Lord of all beings and powers; but because all obedience must flow from love, and acts of duty must be acts of gratitude, before they were challenged into peculiar services they were crowned with peculiar favours. Note, When he that made us saves us we are thereby laid under further obligations to serve him and live to him. God's right to us by redemption corroborates the right he has to us by creation. Now because the first-born of a family are generally the favourites, and some would think it a disparagement to have their eldest sons servants to the priests, and attending before the door of the tabernacle, God took the tribe of Levi entire for his own, in lieu of the first-born, v. 12. Note, God's institutions put no hardships upon men in any of their just interests or reasonable affections. It was presumed that the Israelites would rather part with the Levites than with the first-born, and therefore God graciously ordered the exchange; yet for us he *spared not his own Son*.

#### **Verses 14-39**

The Levites being granted to Aaron to minister to him, they are here delivered to him by tale, that he might know what he had, and employ them accordingly. Observe,

I. By what rule they were numbered: *Every male from a month old and upward*, v. 15. The rest of the tribes were numbered only from twenty years old and upwards, and of them those only that were *able to go forth to war*; but into the number of the Levites they must take in both infants, and infirm; being exempted from the war, it was not insisted upon that they should be of

age and strength for the wars. Though it appears afterwards that little more than a third part of the Levites were fit to be employed in the service of the tabernacle (about 8000 out of 22,000, ch. 4:47, 48), yet God would have them all numbered as retainers to his family; that none may think themselves disowned and rejected of God because they are not in a capacity of doing him that service which they see others do him. The Levites of a month old could not honour God and serve the tabernacle, as those that had grown up; yet out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the Levites' praise was perfected. Let not little children be hindered from being enrolled among the disciples of Christ, for such was the tribe of Levi, of such is the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom of priests. The redemption of the first-born was reckoned from a month old (ch. 18:15, 16), therefore from that age the Levites were numbered. They were numbered *after the house of their fathers*, not their *mothers*, for, if the daughter of a Levite married one of another tribe, her son was not a Levite; but we read of a spiritual priest to our God who inherited the unfeigned faith which dwelt in his mother and grandmother, 2 Tim. 1:5.

II. How they were distributed into three classes, according to the number of the sons of Levi, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, and these subdivided into several families, v. 17–20.

1. Concerning each of these three classes we have an account, (1.) Of their number. The Gershonites were 7500. The Kohathites were 8600. The Merarites were 6200. The rest of the tribes had not their subordinate families numbered by themselves as those of Levi; this honour God put upon his own tribe. (2.) Of their post about the tabernacle on which they were to attend. The Gershonites pitched behind the tabernacle, westward, v. 23. The Kohathites on the right hand, southward, v. 29. The Merarites on the left hand, northward, v. 35. And, to complete the square, Moses and Aaron, with the priests, encamped in the front, eastward, v. 38. Thus was the tabernacle surrounded with its guards; and thus does the *angel of the Lord encamp round about those that fear him*, those living temples, Ps. 34:7. Every one knew his place, and must therein abide with God. (3.) Of their chief or head. As each class had its own place, so each had its own prince. The commander of the Gershonites was Eliasaph (v. 24); of the Kohathites Elizaphan (v. 30), of whom we read (Lev. 10:4) that he was one of the bearers at the funeral of Nadab and Abihu; of the Merarites Zuriel, v. 35. (4.) Of their charge, when the camp moved. Each class knew their own business; it was requisite they should, for that which is every body's work often proves nobody's work. The Gershonites were charged with the custody and carriage of all the curtains and hangings and coverings of the tabernacle and court (v. 25, 26), the Kohathites of all the furniture of the tabernacle—the ark, altar, table, etc. (v. 31, 32), the Merarites of the heavy carriage, boards, bars, pillars, etc., v. 36, 37.

2. Here we may observe, (1.) That the Kohathites, though they were the second house, yet were preferred before the elder family of the Gershonites. Besides that Aaron and the priests were of that family, they were more numerous, and their post and charge more honourable, which probably was ordered to put an honour upon Moses, who was of that family. Yet, (2.) The posterity of Moses were not at all dignified or privileged, but stood upon the level with other Levites, that it might appear he did not seek the advancement of his own family, nor to entail any honours upon it either in church or state; he that had honour enough himself coveted not to have his name shine by that borrowed light, but rather to have the Levites borrow honour from his name. Let none think contemptibly of the Levites, though inferior to the priests, for Moses himself though it preferment

enough for his sons to be Levites. Probably it was because the family of Moses were Levites only that in the title of this chapter, which is concerning that tribe (v. 1), Aaron is put before Moses.

III. The sum total of the numbers of this tribe. They are computed in all 22,000, v. 39. The sum of the particular families amounts to 300 more; if this had been added to the sum total, the Levites, instead of being 273 fewer than the first-born, as they were (v. 43), would have been twenty-seven more, and so the balance would have fallen the other way; but it is supposed that the 300 which were struck off from the account when the exchange was to be made were the first-born of the Levites themselves, born since their coming out of Egypt, which could not be put into the exchange, because they were already sanctified to God. But that which is especially observable here is that the tribe of Levi was by much the least of all the tribes. Note, God's part in the world is too often the smallest part. His chosen are comparatively a little flock.

#### **Verses 40-51**

Here is the exchange made of the Levites for the first-born. 1. The first-born were numbered from a month old, v. 42, 43. Those certainly were not reckoned who, though first-born, had become heads of families themselves, but those only that were under age; and the learned bishop Patrick is decidedly of opinion that none were numbered but those only that were born since their coming out of Egypt, when the first-born were sanctified, Ex. 13:2. If there were 22,000 first-born males, we may suppose as many females, and all these brought forth in the first year after they came out of Egypt, we must hence infer that in the last year of their servitude, even when it was in the greatest extremity, there were abundance of marriages made among the Israelites; they were not discouraged by the present distress, but married in faith, expecting that God would shortly visit them with mercy, and that their children, though born in bondage, should live in liberty and honour. And it was a token of good to them, an evidence that they were blessed of the Lord, that they were not only kept alive, but greatly increased, in a barren wilderness. 2. The number of the first-born, and that of the Levites, by a special providence, came pretty near to each other; thus, when he *divided the nations, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel*, Deu. 32:8. Known unto God are all his works beforehand, and there is an exact proportion between them, and so it will appear when they come to be compared. The Levites' cattle are said to be taken instead of the firstlings *of the cattle of the children of Israel*, that is, the Levites, with all their possessions, were devoted to God instead of the first-born and all theirs; for, when we give ourselves to God, all we have passes as appurtenances with the premises. 3. The small number of first-born which exceeded the number of the Levites (273 in all) were to be redeemed, at five shekels apiece, and the redemption-money given to Aaron; for it would not do well to have them added to the Levites. It is probable that in the exchange they began with the eldest of the first-born, and so downward, so that those were to be redeemed with money who were the 273 youngest of the first-born; more likely so than either that it was determined by lot or that the money was paid out of the public stock. The church is called the church of the *first-born*, which is redeemed, not as these 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*.

## Chapter 4

In the former chapter an account was taken of the whole tribe of Levi, in this we have an account of those of that tribe who were in the prime of their time for service, betwixt thirty and fifty years old. I. The serviceable men of the Kohathites are ordered to be numbered, and their charges are given them (v. 2–20). II. Of the Gershonites (v. 24–28). III. Of the Merarites (v. 29–33). IV. The numbers of each, and the sum total at last, are recorded (v. 34, etc.).

### Verses 1-20

We have here a second muster of the tribe of Levi. As that tribe was taken out of all Israel to be God's peculiar, so the middle-aged men of that tribe were taken from among the rest to be actually employed in the service of the tabernacle. Now observe, I. Who were to be taken into this number. All the males from thirty years old to fifty. Of the other tribes, those that were numbered to go forth to war were from twenty years old and upward, but of the Levites only from thirty to fifty; for the service of God requires the best of our strength, and the prime of our time, which cannot be better spent than to the honour of him who is the first and best. And a man may make a good soldier much sooner than a good minister. Now,

1. They were not to be employed till they were thirty years old, because till then they were in danger of retaining something childish and youthful and had not gravity enough to do the service, and wear the honour, of a Levite. They were entered as probationers at twenty-five years old, (ch. 8:24), and in David's time, when there was more work to be done, at twenty (1 Chr. 23:24, and so Ezra 3:8); but they must be five years learning and waiting, and so fitting themselves for service; nay, in David's time they were ten years in preparation, from twenty to thirty. John Baptist began his public ministry, and Christ his, at thirty years old. This is not in the letter of it obligatory on gospel ministers now, as if they must either not begin their work till thirty years old or must leave off at fifty; but it gives us two good rules:—(1.) That ministers must not be novices, 1 Tim. 3:6. It is a work that requires ripeness of judgment and great steadiness, and therefore those are very unfit for it who are but babes in knowledge and have not put away childish things. (2.) That they must learn before they teach, serve before they rule, and must *first be proved*, 1 Tim. 3:10.

2. They were discharged at fifty years old from the toilsome part of the service, particularly that of carrying the tabernacle; for that is the special service to which they are here ordained, and which there was most occasion for while they were in the wilderness. When they began to enter upon old age, they were dismissed, (1.) In favour to them, that they might not be over-toiled when their strength began to decay. Twenty years' good service was thought pretty well for one man. (2.) In honour to the work, that it might not be done by those who, through the infirmities of age, were slow and heavy. The service of God should be done when we are in the most lively active frame. Those do not consider this who put off their repentance to old age, and so leave the best work to be done in the worst time.

II. How their work is described. They are said to *enter into the host*, or warfare, *to do the work in the tabernacle*. The ministry is *a good work* (1 Tim. 3:1): ministers are not ordained to the honour only, but to the labour, not only to have the wages, but to do the work. It is also a *good warfare*, 1 Tim. 1:18. Those that enter into the ministry must look upon themselves as entered

into the *host*, and approve themselves *good soldiers*, 2 Tim. 2:3. Now, as to the sons of Kohath in particular, here is,

1. Their service appointed them, in the removes of the tabernacle. Afterwards, when the tabernacle was fixed, they had other work assigned them; but this was the work of the day, which was to be done in its day. Observe, Wherever the camp of Israel went, the tabernacle of the Lord went with them, and care must be taken for the carriage of it. Note, Wherever we go, we must see to it that we take our religion along with us, and not forget that or any part of it. Now the Koliathites were to carry all the holy things of the tabernacle. They were charged with those things before (ch. 3:31), but here they have more particular instructions given them. (1.) Aaron, and his sons the priests, must pack up the things which the Kohathites were to carry, as here directed, v. 5, etc. God had before appointed that none should come into the most holy place, but only Aaron once a year with a cloud of incense (Lev. 16:2); and yet, the necessity of their unsettled state requiring it, that law is here dispensed with; for every time they removed Aaron and his sons went in to take down the ark, and make it up for carriage; for (as the learned bishop Patrick suggests) the *shechinah*, or display of the divine majesty, which was over the mercy-seat, removed for the present in the pillar of cloud, which was taken up, and then the ark was not dangerous to be approached. (2.) All the holy things must be covered, the ark and table with three coverings, all the rest with two. Even the ashes of the altar, in which the holy fire was carefully preserved and raked up, must have a purple cloth spread over them, v. 13. Even the brazen altar, though in the court of the sanctuary it stood open to the view of all, yet was covered in the carriage of it. All these coverings were designed, [1.] For safety, that these holy things might not be ruffled with the wind, sullied with the rain, nor tarnished with the sun, but that they might be preserved in their beauty; for *on all the glory shall be a defence*. The coverings of badgers' skins, being thick and strong, would keep out wet; and, while we are in our passage through the wilderness of this world, it concerns us to be fenced *for all weathers*, Isa. 4:5, 6. [2.] For decency and ornament. Most of these things had a cloth of blue, or purple, or scarlet, spread outmost; and the ark was covered with a cloth *wholly of blue* (v. 6), an emblem (say some) of the azure skies, which are spread like a curtain between us and the Majesty on high, Job 26:9. Those that are faithful to God should endeavour likewise to appear beautiful before men, that they may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*. [3.] For concealment. It signified the darkness of that dispensation. That which is now brought to light by the gospel, and revealed to babes, was then hidden from the wise and prudent. They saw only the coverings, not the holy things themselves (Heb. 10:1); but now Christ has *destroyed the face of the covering*, Isa. 25:7. (3.) When all the holy things were covered, then the Kohathites were to carry them on their shoulders. These things that had staves were carried by their staves (v. 6, 8, 11, 14); those that had not were carried upon a bar, or bier, or bearing barrow, v. 10, 12. See how the tokens of God's presence in this world are movable things; but we look for a kingdom that cannot be moved.

2. Eleazar, now the eldest son of Aaron, is appointed overseer of the Kohathites in this service (v. 16); he must take care that nothing was forgotten, left behind, or displaced. As a priest he had more honour than the Levites, but then he had more care; and that care was a heavier burden, no doubt, upon his heart, than all the burdens that were laid upon their shoulders. It is much easier to do the work of the tabernacle than to discharge the trusts of it, to obey than to rule.

3. Great care must be taken to preserve the lives of these Levites, by preventing their unseasonable irreverent approach to the

most holy things: *Cut you not off the Kohathites*, v. 18. Note, Those who do not what they can to keep others from sin do what they can to cut them off. [1.] The Kohathites must not see the holy things till the priests had covered them, v. 20. Even those that bore the vessels of the Lord saw not what they bore, so much were even those in the dark concerning the gospel whose office it was to expound the law. And, [2.] When the holy things were covered, they might not touch them, at least not the ark, called here *the holy thing*, upon pain of death, v. 15. Uzza was struck dead for the breach of this law. Thus were the Lord's ministers themselves then kept in fear, and that was a dispensation of terror, as well as darkness; but now, through Christ, the case is altered; we have *seen with our eyes*, and our *hands have handles, the word of life* (1 Jn. 1:1), and we are encouraged to *come boldly to the throne of grace*.

### **Verses 21-33**

We have here the charge of the other two families of the Levites, which, though not so honourable as the first, yet was necessary, and was to be done regularly. 1. The Gershonites were charged with all the drapery of the tabernacle, the curtains, and hangings, and the coverings of badgers' skins, v. 22–26. These they were to take down when the cloud removed, and the ark and the rest of the holy things were carried away, to pack up and bring with them, and then to set up again, where the cloud rested. Aaron and his sons allotted to them their respective charge: "You shall take care of such a curtain, and you of such a hanging, that every one may know his work, and there may be no confusion," v. 27. Ithamar particularly was to take the oversight of them, v. 28. 2. The Merarites were charged with the heavy carriage, the boards and bars, the pillars and sockets, the pins and cords, and these were delivered to them by name, v. 31, 32. An inventory was given them of every particular, that it might be forthcoming, and nothing to seek, when the tabernacle was to be set up again. Though these seemed of less importance than the other things pertaining to the sanctuary, yet there was this care taken of them, to teach us with the greatest exactness to preserve pure and entire all divine institutions, and to take care that nothing be lost. It also intimates the care God takes of his church, and every member of it; the good Shepherd *calls his own sheep by name*, Jn. 10:3. Here were thousands of men employed about these services, though a much less number would have served for the bearing of those burdens; but it was requisite that the tabernacle should be taken down, and set up, with great expedition, and many hands would make quick work, especially when every one knew his work. They had tents of their own to take care of, and to take along with them, but the young men under thirty, and the old men above fifty, might serve for them; nor is there any mention of them, for God's house must always be preferred before our own. Their care was preposterous who built and ceiled their own houses while God's house lay waste, Hag. 1:4, 9. The death of the saints is represented as the taking down of the tabernacle (2 Co. 5:1), and the putting of it off, 2 Pt. 1:14. The immortal soul, like the most holy things, is first covered and taken away, carried by angels, unseen, under the inspection of the Lord Jesus, our Eleazar. Care is also taken of the body—the skin and flesh, which are as the curtains, the bones and sinews which are as the bars and pillars; none of these shall be lost; commandment is given concerning the bones, a covenant made with the dust; these are in safe custody, and shall all be produced in the great day, when this tabernacle shall be set up again, and these vile bodies made like the glorious body of Jesus Christ.

### **Verses 34-49**

We have here a particular account of the numbers of the three families of the Levites respectively, that is, of the effective men, between thirty years old and fifty. Observe, 1. The Kohathites were, in all, 8600 from a month old and upwards; but of these there were but 2750 serviceable men, not a third part. The Gershonites, in all, 7500, and of them but 2630 serviceable men, little more than a third part. Note, Of the many that add to the numbers of the church, there are comparatively but few that contribute to the service of it. So it has been, and so it is; many have a place in the tabernacle that do but little of the work of the tabernacle, Phil. 2:20, 21. 2. That the Merarites were but 6200 in all, and yet of these there were 3200 serviceable men, that is, more than half. The greatest burden lay upon that family, the boards, and pillars, and sockets; and God so ordered it that, though they were the fewest in number, yet they should have the most able men among them; for whatever service God calls men to he will furnish them for it, and give strength in proportion to the work, grace sufficient. 3. The whole number of the able men of the tribe of Levi who entered into God's host to war his warfare was but 8580, whereas the able men of the other tribes that entered into the host of Israel to war their warfare were many more. The least of the tribes had almost four times as many able men as the Levites, and some of them more than eight times as many; for those that are engaged in the service of this world, and war after the flesh, are many more than those that are devoted to the service of God, and *fight the good fight of faith*.

## Chapter 5

In this chapter we have, I. An order, pursuant to the laws already made, for the removing of the unclean out of the camp (v. 1-4). II. A repetition of the laws concerning restitution, in case of wrong done to a neighbour (v. 5-8), and concerning the appropriating of the hallowed things to the priests (v. 9, 10). III. A new law made concerning the trial of a wife suspected of adultery, by the waters of jealousy (v. 11, etc.).

### Verses 1-10

Here is, I. A command for the purifying of the camp, by turning out from within its lines all those that were ceremonially unclean, by issues, leprosies, or the touch of dead bodies, until they were cleansed according to the law, v. 2, 3.

1. These orders are executed immediately, v. 4. (1.) The camp was now newly-modelled and put in order, and therefore, to complete the reformation of it, it is next to be cleansed. Note, The purity of the church must be as carefully consulted and preserved as the peace and order of it. It is requisite, not only that every Israelite be confined to his own standard, but that every polluted Israelite be separated from it. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable.* (2.) God's tabernacle was now fixed in the midst of their camp, and therefore they must be careful to keep it clean. Note, The greater profession of religion any house or family make the more they are obliged to *put away iniquity far from their tabernacle*, Job 22:23. The person, the place, *in the midst of which God dwells*, must not be defiled; for, if it be, he will be affronted, offended, and provoked to withdraw, 1 Co. 3:16, 17.

2. This expulsion of the unclean out of the camp was to signify, (1.) What the governors of the church ought to do: they must *separate between the precious and the vile*, and purge out scandalous persons, as old leaven (1 Co. 5:8, 13), lest others should be infected and defiled, Heb. 12:15. It is for the glory of Christ and the edification of his church that those who are openly and incorrigibly profane and vicious should be put out and kept from Christian communion till they repent. (2.) What God himself will do in the great day: he will *thoroughly purge his floor*, and *gather out of his kingdom all things that offend*. As here the unclean were shut out of the camp, so into the new Jerusalem *no unclean thing shall enter*, Rev. 21:27.

II. A law concerning restitution, in case of wrong done to a neighbour. It is called *a sin that men commit* (v. 6), because it is common among men; *a sin of man*, that is, *a sin against man*, so it is thought it should be translated and understood. If a man overreach or defraud his brother in any matter, it is to be looked upon as a trespass against the Lord, who is the protector of right, the punisher of wrong, and who strictly charges and commands us to do justly. Now what is to be done when a man's awakened conscience charges him with guilt of this kind, and brings it to his remembrance though done long ago? 1. He must *confess his sin*, confess it to God, confess it to his neighbour, and so take shame to himself. If he have denied it before, though it go against the grain to own himself in a lie, yet he must do it; because his heart was hardened he denied it, therefore he has no other way of making it appear that his heart is now softened but by confessing it. 2. He must bring a sacrifice, *a ram of atonement*, v. 8. Satisfaction must be made for the offence done to God, whose law is broken, as well as for the loss sustained by our neighbour; restitution in this case is not sufficient without faith and repentance. 3. Yet the sacrifices would not be

accepted till full amends were made to the party wronged, not only the principal, but a fifth part added to it, v. 7. It is certain that while that which is got by injustice is knowingly retained in the hands the guilt of the injustice remains upon the conscience, and is not purged by sacrifice nor offering, prayers nor tears, for it is one and the same continued act of sin persisted in. This law we had before (Lev. 6:4), and it is here added that if the party wronged was dead, and he had no near kinsman who was entitled to the debt, or if it was any way uncertain to whom the restitution should be made, this should not serve for an excuse to detain what was unjustly gotten; to whomsoever it pertained, it was certainly none of his that got it by sin, and therefore it must be given to the priest, v. 8. If there were any that could make out a title to it, it must not be given to the priest (God hates robbery for burnt-offerings); but, if there were not, then it lapsed to the great Lord (*ob defectum sanguinis—for want of issue*), and the priests were his receivers. Note, Some work of piety or charity is a piece of necessary justice to be done by those who are conscience to themselves that they have done wrong, but know not how otherwise to make restitution; what is not our property will never be our profit.

III. A general rule concerning hallowed things given upon this occasion, that, whatever was given to the priest, *his it shall be*, v. 9, 10. 1. He that gave it was not to receive his gift again upon any pretence whatsoever. This law ratifies and confirms all grants for pious uses, that people might not give things to the priests in a fit of zeal, and then recall them in a fit of vexation. 2. The other priests should not come in sharers with that priest who then officiated, and to whom the hallowed thing, whatever it was, was given. Let him that was most ready and diligent in attending fare the better for it: if he do the work, let him have the pay, and much good may it do him.

### **Verses 11-31**

We have here the law concerning the solemn trial of a wife whose husband was jealous of her. Observe,

I. What was the case supposed: That a man had some reason to suspect his wife to have committed adultery, v. 12–14. Here, 1. The sin of adultery is justly represented as an exceedingly sinful sin; it is going aside from God and virtue, and the good way, Prov. 2:17. It is committing a trespass against the husband, robbing him of his honour, alienating his right, introducing a spurious breed into his family to share with his children in his estate, and violating her covenant with him. It is being defiled; for nothing pollutes the mind and conscience more than this sin does. 2. It is supposed to be a sin which great care is taken by the sinners to conceal, which there is no witness of. *The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, Job 24:15. And the adulteress takes her opportunity when *the good man is not at home*, Prov. 7:19. It would not covet to be secret if it were not shameful; and the devil who draws sinners to this sin teaches them how to cover it. 3. The *spirit of jealousy* is supposed to come upon the husband, of which Solomon says, It is the *rage of a man* (Prov. 6:34), and that it is *cruel as the grave*, Cant. 8:6. 4. "Yet" (say the Jewish writers) "he must make it appear that he has some just cause for the suspicion." The rule they give is, "If the husband have said unto his wife before witnesses, 'Be not thou in secret with such a man;' and, notwithstanding that admonition, it is afterwards proved that she was in secret with that man, though her father or her brother, then he may compel her to drink the bitter water." But the law here does not tie him to that particular method of proving the just cause of his suspicion; it might be otherwise proved. In case it could be proved that she had committed adultery, she was to be put to death

(Lev. 20:10); but, if it was uncertain, then this law took place. Hence, (1.) Let all wives be admonished not to give any the least occasion for the suspicion of their chastity; it is not enough that they abstain from the evil of uncleanness, but they must abstain from all appearance of it, from every thing that looks like it, or leads to it, or may give the least umbrage to jealousy; for *how great a matter may a little fire kindle!* (2.) Let all husbands be admonished not to entertain any causeless or unjust suspicions of their wives. If charity in general, much more conjugal affection, teaches to *think no evil*, 1 Co. 13:5. It is the happiness of the virtuous woman that *the heart of her husband does safely trust in her*, Prov. 31:11.

II. What was the course prescribed in this case, that, if the suspected wife was innocent, she might not continue under the reproach and uneasiness of her husband's jealousy, and, if guilty, her sin might find her out, and others might hear, and fear, and take warning.

1. The process of the trial must be thus:—(1.) Her husband must *bring her to the priest*, with the witnesses that could prove the ground of his suspicion, and desire that she might be put upon her trial. The Jews say that the priest was first to endeavour to persuade her to confess the truth, saying to this purport, "Dear daughter, perhaps thou wast overtaken by drinking wine, or wast carried away by the heat of youth or the examples of bad neighbours; come, confess the truth, for the sake of his great name which is described in the most sacred ceremony, and do not let it be blotted out with the bitter water." If she confessed, saying, "I am defiled," she was not put to death, but was divorced and lost her dowry; if she said, "I am pure," then they proceeded. (2.) He must bring a coarse offering of barley-meal, without oil or frankincense, agreeably to the present afflicted state of his family; for a great affliction it was either to have cause to be jealous or to be jealous without cause. It is an *offering of memorial*, to signify that what was to be done was intended as a religious appeal to the omniscience and justice of God. (3.) The priest was to prepare the water of jealousy, the holy water out of the laver at which the priests were to wash when they ministered; this must be brought in an *earthen vessel*, containing (they say) about a pint; and it must be an *earthen vessel*, because the coarser and plainer every thing was the more agreeable it was to the occasion. *Dust* must be put into the water, to signify the reproach she lay under, and the shame she ought to take to herself, putting her mouth in the dust; but dust from *the floor of the tabernacle*, to put an honour upon every thing that pertained to the place God had chosen to put his name there, and to keep up in the people a reverence for it; see Jn. 8:6. (4.) The woman was to be *set before the Lord*, at the east gate of the temple-court (say the Jews), and her head was to be uncovered, in token of her sorrowful condition; and there she stood for a spectacle to the world, that other women might learn not to do *after her lewdness*, Eze. 23:48. Only the Jews say, "Her own servants were not to be present, that she might not seem vile in their sight, who were to give honour to her; her husband also must be dismissed." (5.) The priest was to adjure her to tell the truth, and to denounce the curse of God against her if she were guilty, and to declare what would be the effect of her drinking the water of jealousy, v. 19–22. He must assure her that, if she were innocent, the water would do her no harm, v. 19. None need fear the curse of the law if they have not broken the commands of the law. But, if she were guilty, this water would be poison to her, it would make her *belly to swell and her thigh to rot*, and she should be a curse or abomination among her people, v. 21, 22. To this she must say, *Amen*, as Israel must do to the curses pronounced on mount Ebal, Deu. 27:15–26. Some think the *Amen*, being doubled, respects both parts of the

adjuration, both that which freed her if innocent and that which condemned her if guilty. No woman, if she were guilty, could say *Amen* to this adjuration, and drink the water upon it, unless she disbelieved the truth of God or defied his justice, and had come to such a pitch of impudence and hard-heartedness in sin as to challenge God Almighty to do his worst, and choose rather to venture upon his curse than to give him glory by making confession; thus has whoredom *taken away the heart*. (6.) The priest was to write this curse in a scrip or scroll o parchment, *verbatim—word for word*, as he had expressed it, and then to wipe or scrape out what he had written into the water (v. 23), to signify that it was that curse which impregnated the water, and gave it its strength to effect what was intended. It signified that, if she were innocent, the curse should be blotted out and never appear against her, as it is written, Isa. 43:25, *I am he that blotteth out thy transgression*, and Ps. 51:9, *Blot out my iniquities*; but that, if she were guilty, the curse, as it was written, being infused into the water, would enter into her bowels with the water, even *like oil into her bones* (Ps. 109:18), as we read of a curse entering into a house, Zec. 5:4. (7.) The woman must then drink the water (v. 24); it is called *the bitter water*, some think because they put wormwood in it to make it bitter, or rather because it caused the curse. Thus sin is called *an evil thing and a bitter* for the same reason, because it *causeth the curse*, Jer. 2:19. If she had been guilty (and otherwise it did not cause the curse), she was made to know that though her stolen waters had been sweet, and her *bread eaten in secret pleasant*, yet the end was *bitter as wormwood*, Prov. 9:17, and ch. 5:4. Let all that meddle with forbidden pleasures know that they will be bitterness in the latter end. The Jews say that if, upon denouncing the curse, the woman was so terrified that she durst not drink the water, but confessed she was defiled, the priest flung down the water, and cast her offering among the ashes, and she was divorced without dowry: if she confessed not, and yet would not drink, they forced her to it; and, if she was ready to throw it up again, they hastened her away, that she might not pollute the holy place. (8.) Before she drank the water, the jealousy-offering was waved and offered upon the altar (v. 25, 26); a handful of it was burnt for a memorial, and the remainder of it eaten by the priest, unless the husband was a priest, and then it was scattered among the ashes. This offering in the midst of the transaction signified that the whole was an appeal to God, as a God that knows all things, and *from whom no secret is hid*. (9.) All things being thus performed according to the law, they were to wait the issue. The water, with a little dust put into it, and the scrapings of a written parchment, had no natural tendency at all to do either good or hurt; but if God was thus appealed to in the way of an instituted ordinance, though otherwise the innocent might have continued under suspicion and the guilty undiscovered, yet God would so far own his own institution as that in a little time, by the miraculous operation of Providence, the innocency of the innocent should be cleared, and the sin of the guilty should find them out. [1.] If the suspected woman was really guilty, the water she drank would be poison to her (v. 27), her belly would swell and her thigh rot by a vile disease for vile deserts, and she would *mourn at the last when her flesh and body were consumed*, Prov. 5:11. Bishop Patrick says, from some of the Jewish writers, that the effect of these waters appeared immediately, she grew pale, and her eyes ready to start out of her head. Dr. Lightfoot says that sometimes it appeared not for two or three years, but she bore no children, was sickly, languished, and rotted at last; it is probable that some indications appeared immediately. The rabbin say that the adulterer also died in the same day and hour that the adulteress did, and in the same manner too, that he belly swelled, and his secret parts rotted: a disease perhaps not much unlike that which in these latter

ages the avenging hand of a righteous God has made the scourge of uncleanness, and with which whores and whoremongers infect, and plague, and ruin one another, since they escape punishment from men. The Jewish doctors add that the waters had this effect upon the adulteress only in case the husband had never offended in the same kind; but that, if he had at any time defiled the marriage-bed, God did not thus right him against his injurious wife; and that therefore in the latter and degenerate ages of the Jewish church, when uncleanness did abound, this way of trial was generally disused and laid aside; men, knowing their own crimes, were content not to know their wives' crimes. And to this perhaps may refer the threatening (Hos. 4:14), *I will not punish your spouses when they commit adultery, for you yourselves are separated with whores.* [2.] If she were innocent, the water she drank would be physic to her: *She shall be free, and shall conceive seed,* v. 28. The Jewish writers magnify the good effects of this water to the innocent woman, that, to recompense her for the wrong done to her by the suspicion, she should, after the drinking of these waters, be stronger and look better than ever; if she was sickly, she should become healthful, should bear a man-child, and have easy labour.

2. From the whole we may learn, (1.) That secret sins are known to God, and sometimes are strangely brought to light in this life; however, there is a day coming when God will, by Jesus Christ, as here by the priest, judge the *secrets of men according to the gospel*, Rom. 2:16. (2.) That, in particular, *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* The violation of conjugal faith and chastity is highly provoking to the God of heaven, and sooner or later it will be reckoned for. Though we have not now the waters of jealousy to be a sensible terror to the unclean, yet we have a word from God which ought to be as great a terror, that if *any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*, 1 Co. 3:17. (3.) That God will find out some way or other to clear the innocency of the innocent, and to bring forth their righteousness as the light. (4.) That to *the pure all things are pure*, but to *the defiled nothing* is so, Tit. 1:15. The same word is to some a *savour of life unto life*, to others a *savour of death unto death*, like those waters of jealousy, according as they receive it; the same providence is for good to some and for hurt to others, Jer. 24:5, 8, 9. And, whatsoever it is intended for, it *shall not return void.*

## Chapter 6

In this chapter we have, I. The law concerning Nazarites, 1. What it was to which the vow of a Nazarite obliged him (v. 1-8). 2. A remedial law in case a Nazarite happened to be polluted by the touch of a dead body (v. 9-12). 3. The solemnity of his discharge when his time was up (v. 13-21). II. Instructions given to the priests how they should bless the people (v. 22, etc.).

### Verses 1-21

After the law for the discovery and shame of those that by sin had made themselves vile, fitly follows this for the direction and encouragement of those who by their eminent piety and devotion had made themselves honourable, and distinguished themselves from their neighbours. It is very probable that there were those before the making of this law who went under the character of *Nazarites*, and were celebrated by that title as persons professing greater strictness and zeal in religion than other people; for the vow of a Nazarite is spoken of here as a thing already well known, but the obligation of it is reduced to a greater certainty than hitherto it had been. Joseph is called a Nazarite among his brethren (Gen. 49:26), not only because separate from them, but because eminent among them. Observe,

I. The general character of a Nazarite: it is a person *separated unto the Lord*, v. 2. Some were Nazarites for life, either by divine designation, as Samson (Jdg. 13:5), and John Baptist (Lu. 1:15), or by their parents' vow concerning them, as Samuel, 1 Sa. 1:11. Of these this law speaks not. Others were so for a certain time, and by their own voluntary engagement, and concerning them rules are given by this law. A woman might bind herself with the vow of a Nazarite, under the limitations we find, ch. 30:3, where the vow which the woman is supposed to vow unto the Lord seems to be meant especially of this vow. The Nazarites were, 1. Devoted to the Lord during the time of their Nazariteship, and, it is probable, spent much of their time in the study of the law, in acts of devotion, and instructing others. An air of piety was thereby put upon them, and upon their whole conversation. 2. They were separated from common persons and common things. Those that are consecrated to God must not be conformed to this world. They distinguished themselves, not only from others, but from what they themselves were before and after. 3. They separated themselves by vowing a vow. Every Israelite was bound by the divine law to love God with all his heart, but the Nazarites by their own act and deed bound themselves to some religious observances, as fruits and expressions of that love, which other Israelites were not bound to. Some such there were, whose spirits God stirred up to be in their day the ornaments of the church, the standard-bearers of religion, and patterns of piety. It is spoken of as a great favour to their nation that God *raised up of their young men for Nazarites*, Amos 2:11. The Nazarites were known in the streets and respected as *purser than snow, whiter than milk*, Lam. 4:7. Christ was called in reproach a Nazarene, so were his followers: but he was no Nazarite according to this law; he drank wine, and touched dead bodies, yet in his this type had its accomplishment, for in him all purity and perfection met; and every true Christian is a spiritual Nazarite, separated by vow unto the Lord. We find St. Paul, by the persuasion of his friends, in complaisance to the Jews, submitting to this law of the Nazarites; but at the same time it is declared that the Gentiles should *observe no such thing*, Acts 21:24, 25. It was looked upon as a great honour to a man to be a Nazarite, and therefore if a man speak of it as a punishment, saying for instance, "I will be a

Nazarite rather than do so or so," he is (say the Jews) a wicked man; but he that vows unto the Lord in the way of holiness to be a Nazarite, lo, *the crown of his God is upon his head*.

II. The particular obligations that the Nazarites lay under. That the fancies of superstitious men might not multiply their restraints endlessly, God himself lays down the law for them, and gives them the rule of their profession.

1. They must have nothing to do with *the fruit of the vine*, v. 3, 4. They must drink no wine nor string drink, nor eat grapes, no, not the kernel nor the husk; they might not so much as eat a raisin. The learned Dr. Lightfoot has a conjecture (Hor. Heb. in Luc. 1.15), that, as the ceremonial pollutions by leprosy and otherwise represented the sinful state of fallen man, so the institution of the order of Nazarites was designed to represent the pure and perfect state of man in innocency, and that the tree of knowledge, forbidden to Adam, was the vine, and for that reason it was forbidden to the Nazarites, and all the produce of it. Those who gave the Nazarites wine to drink did the tempter's work (Amos 2:12), persuading them to that forbidden fruit. That it was reckoned a perfection and praise not to drink wine appears from the instance of the Rechabites, Jer. 35:6. They were to *drink no wine*, (1.) That they might be examples of temperance and mortification. Those that separate themselves to God and to his honour must not gratify the desires of the body, but keep it under and bring it into subjection. Drinking *a little wine for the stomach's sake* is allowed, to help that, 1 Tim. 5:23. But drinking much wine for the *palate's sake*, to please that, does by no means become those who profess to walk not *after the flesh, but after the Spirit*. (2.) That they might be qualified to employ themselves in the service of God. They must not drink, lest they should *forget the law* (Prov. 31:5), lest they should *err through wine*, Isa. 28:7. Let all Christians oblige themselves to 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 a very easy prey to Satan. It is observable that because they were to drink no wine (which was the thing mainly intended) they were to eat nothing that came of the vine, to teach us with the utmost care and caution to avoid sin and every thing that borders upon it and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us. *Abstain from all appearance of evil*, 1 Th. 5:22.

2. They must not *cut their hair*, v. 5. They must neither poll their heads nor shave their beards; this was that mark of Samson's Nazariteship which we often read of in his story. Now, (1.) This signified a noble neglect of the body and the ease and ornament of it, which became those who, being separated to God, ought to be wholly taken up with their souls, to secure their peace and beauty. It signified that they had, for the present, renounced all sorts of sensual pleasures and delights, and resolved to live a life of self-denial and mortification. Mephibosheth in sorrow *trimmed not his beard*, 2 Sa. 19:24. (2.) Some observe that long hair is spoken of as a badge of subjection (1 Co. 11:5, etc.); so that the long hair of the Nazarites denoted their subjection to God, and their putting themselves under his dominion. (3.) By this they were known to all that met them to be Nazarites, and so it commanded respect. It made them look great without art; it was nature's crown to the head, and a testimony for them that they had preserved their purity. For, if they had been defiled, their hair must have been cut, v. 9. See Jer. 7:29.

3. They must not come near any dead body, v. 6, 7. Others might touch dead bodies, and contracted only a ceremonial pollution by it for some time; some must do it, else the dead must be unburied; but the Nazarites must not do it, upon pain of forfeiting all the honour of their Nazariteship. They must not attend the funeral of any relation, no, not father nor mother, any

more than the high priest himself, because *the consecration of his God is upon his head*. Those that separate themselves to God must learn, (1.) To distinguish themselves, and do more than others. (2.) To keep their consciences pure from dead works, and not to touch the unclean thing. The greater profession of religion we make, and the more eminent we appear, the greater care we must take to avoid all sin, for we have so much the more honour to lose by it. (3.) To moderate their affections even to their near relations, so as not to let their sorrow for the loss of them break in upon their joy in God and submission to his will. See Mt. 8:21, 22.

4. All *the days of their separation* they must be *holy to the Lord*, v. 8. This was the meaning of those external observances, and without this they were of no account. The Nazarites must be devoted to God, employed for him, and their minds intent upon him; they must keep themselves pure in heart and life, and be in every thing conformable to the divine image and will; this is to be holy, this is to be a Nazarite indeed.

III. The provision that was made for the cleansing of a Nazarite, if he happened unavoidably to contract a ceremonial pollution by the touch of a dead body. No penalty is ordered by this law for the wilful breach of the foregoing laws; for it was not supposed that a man who had so much religion as to make that vow could have so little as to break it presumptuously: nor could it be supposed that he should drink wine, or have his hair cut, but by his own fault; but purely by the providence of God, without any fault of his own, he might be near a dead body, and that is the case put (v. 9): *If a man die very suddenly by him, he has defiled the head of his consecration*. Note, Death sometimes takes men away very suddenly, and without any previous warning. A man might be well and dead in so little a time that the most careful Nazarite could not avoid being polluted by the dead body; so short a step is it sometimes, and so soon taken, from time to eternity. God prepare us for sudden death! In this case, 1. He must be purified from the ceremonial pollution he had contracted, as others must, upon the seventh day, v. 9. Nay, more was required for the purifying of the Nazarite than of any other person that had touched a dead body; he must bring a sin-offering and a burnt-offering, and an atonement must be *made for him*, v. 10, 11. This teaches us that sins of infirmity, and the faults we are overtaken in by surprise, must be seriously repented of, and that an application must be made of the virtue of Christ's sacrifice to our souls for the forgiveness of them every day, 1 Jn. 2:1, 2. It teaches us also that, if those who make an eminent profession of religion do any thing to sully the reputation of their profession, more is expected from them than others, for the retrieving both of their peace and of their credit. 2. He must begin the days of his separation again; for all that were past before his pollution, though coming ever so near the period of his time set, were lost, and not reckoned to him, v. 12. This obliged them to be very careful not to defile themselves by the dead, for that was the only thing that made them lose their time, and it teaches us that *if a righteous man turn away from his righteousness*, and defile himself with dead works, all his righteousness that he has done shall be lost to him, Eze. 33:13. It is all lost, all in vain, if he do not persevere, Gal. 3:4. He must begin again, and do his first works.

IV. The law for the solemn discharge of a Nazarite from his vow, when he had completed the time he fixed to himself. Before the expiration of that term he could not be discharged; before he vowed, it was in his own power, but it was too late after the vow to make enquiry. The Jews say that the time of a Nazarite's vow could not be less than thirty days; and if a man said, "I

will be a Nazarite but for two days," yet he was bound for thirty; but it should seem Paul's vow was for only seven days (Acts 21:27), or, rather, then he observed the ceremony of finishing that vow of Nazariteship from which, being at a distance from the temple, he had discharged himself some years before at Cenchrea only by the ceremony of cutting his hair, Acts 18:18. When the time of the vowed separation was out, he was to be made free, 1. Publicly, *at the door of the tabernacle* (v. 13), that all might take notice of the finishing of his vow, and none might be offended if they saw him now drink wine, who had so lately refused. 2. It was to be done with sacrifices, v. 14. Lest he should think that by this eminent piece of devotion he had made God a debtor to him, he is appointed, even when he had finished his vow, to bring an offering to God; for, when we have done our utmost in duty to God, still we must own ourselves behind-hand with him. He must bring one of each sort of the instituted offerings. (1.) A burnt-offering, as an acknowledgment of God's sovereign dominion over him and all he had still, notwithstanding his discharge from this particular vow. (2.) A sin-offering. This, though mentioned second (v. 14), yet seems to have been offered first (v. 16), for atonement must be made for our sins before any of our sacrifices can be accepted. And it is very observable that even the Nazarite, who in the eye of men was *purser than snow* and *whiter than milk*, yet durst not appear before the holy God without a sin-offering. Though he had fulfilled the vow of his separation without any pollution, yet he must bring a sacrifice for sin; for there is guilt insensibly contracted by the best of men, even in their best works—some good omitted, some ill admitted, which, if we were dealt with in strict justice, would be our ruin, and in consequence of which it is necessary for us to receive the atonement, and plead it as our righteousness before God. (3.) A peace-offering, in thankfulness to God who had enabled him to fulfil his vow, and in supplication to God for grace to preserve him from ever doing any thing unbecoming one that had been once a Nazarite, remembering that, though he was now freed from the bonds of his own vow, he still remained under the bonds of the divine law. (4.) To these were added the meat-offerings and drink-offerings, according to the manner (v. 15, 17), for these always accompanied the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings: and, besides these, a basket of unleavened cakes, and wafers. (5.) Part of the peace-offering, with a cake and wafer, was to be waved for a wave-offering (v. 19, 20); and this was a gratuity to the priest, who had it for his pains, after it had been first presented to God. (6.) Besides all this, he might bring his free-will offerings, *such as his hand shall get*, v. 21. More than this he might bring, but not less. And, to grace the solemnity, it was common upon this occasion to have their friends to be at *charges with them*, Acts 21:24. *Lastly*, One ceremony more was appointed, which was like the cancelling of the bond when the condition is performed, and that was the *cutting off of his hair*, which had been suffered to grow all the time of his being a Nazarite, and burning it in the fire over which the peace-offerings were boiling, v. 18. This intimated that his full performance of his vow was acceptable to God in Christ the great sacrifice, and not otherwise. Learn hence to *vow and pay to the Lord our God*, for *he has no pleasure in fools*.

#### **Verses 22-27**

Here, I. The priests, among other good offices which they were to do, are appointed solemnly to bless the people in the *name of the Lord*, v. 23. It was part of their work, Deu. 21:5. Hereby God put an honour upon the priests, for *the less is blessed of the better*; and hereby he gave great comfort and satisfaction to the people, who looked upon the priest as God's mouth to them.

Though the priests of himself could do no more than beg a blessing, yet being an intercessor by office, and doing that in his name who commands the blessing, the prayer carried with it a promise, and he pronounced it as one having authority with his hands lifted up and his face towards the people. Now, 1. This was a type of Christ's errand into the world, which was to *bless us* (Acts 3:26), as the high priest of our profession. The last thing he did on earth was with uplifted hands to bless his disciples, Lu. 24:50, 51. The learned bishop Pearson observes it as a tradition of the Jews that the priests blessed the people only at the close of the morning sacrifice, not of the evening sacrifice, to show (says he) that in the last days, the days of the Messiah, which are (as it were) the evening of the world, the benediction of the law should cease, and the blessing of Christ should take place. 2. It was a pattern to gospel ministers, the masters of assemblies, who are in like manner to dismiss their solemn assemblies with a blessing. The same that are God's mouth to his people, to teach and command them, are his mouth likewise to bless them; and those that receive the law shall receive the blessing. The Hebrew doctors warn the people that they say not, "What availeth the blessing of this poor simple priest? "For," say they, "the receiving of the blessing depends, not on the priest, but on the holy blessed God."

II. A form of blessing is here prescribed them. In their other devotions no form was prescribed, but this being God's command concerning benediction, that it might not look like any thing of their own, he puts the very words in their mouths, v. 24–26. Here observe, 1. That the blessing is commanded upon each particular person: *The Lord bless thee*. They must each of them prepare themselves to receive the blessing, and then they should find enough in it to make them every man happy. *Blessed shalt thou be*, Deu. 28:3. If we take the law to ourselves, we may take the blessing to ourselves, as if our names were inserted. 2. That the name *Jehovah* is three times repeated in it, and (as the critics observe) each with a different accent in the original; the Jews themselves think there is some mystery in this, and we know what it is, the New Testament having explained it, which directs us to expect the blessing from *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost*, each of which persons is *Jehovah*, and yet they are "not three Lords, but one Lord," 2 Co. 13:14. 3. That the favour of God is all in all in this blessing, for that is the fountain of all good. (1.) *The Lord bless thee!* Our blessing God is only our speaking well of him; his blessing us is doing well for us; those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. (2.) *The Lord make his face shine upon thee*, alluding to the shining of the sun upon the earth, to enlighten and comfort it, and to renew the face of it. "The Lord love thee and cause thee to know that he loves thee." We cannot but be happy if we have God's love; and we cannot but be easy if we know that we have it. (3.) *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee*. This is to the same purport with the former, and it seems to allude to the smiles of a father upon his child, or of a man upon his friend whom he takes pleasure in. If God give us the assurances of his special favour and his acceptance of us, this will *put gladness into the heart*, Ps. 4:7, 8. 4. That the fruits of this favour conveyed by this blessing are protection, pardon, and peace. (1.) Protection from evil, v. 24. The Lord *keep thee*, for it is he that keeps Israel, and neither *slumbers nor sleeps* (Ps. 121:4), and all believers are *kept by the power of God*. (2.) Pardon of sin, v. 25. The Lord be *gracious, or merciful*, unto thee. (3.) Peace (v. 26), including all that good which goes to make up a complete happiness.

III. God here promises to ratify and confirm the blessing: *They shall put my name upon the children of Israel*, v. 27. God gives

them leave to make use of his name in blessing the people, and to bless them as his people, called by his name. This included all the blessings they could pronounce upon them, to mark them for God's peculiar, the people of his choice and love. God's name upon them was their honour, their comfort, their safety, their plea. *We are called by thy name, leave us not.* It is added, *and I will bless them.* Note, A divine blessing goes along with divine institutions, and puts virtue and efficacy into them. What Christ says of the peace is true of the blessing, "Peace to this congregation," if the sons of peace and heirs of blessing be there, the peace, the blessing, shall rest upon them, Lu. 10:5, 6. For in *every place where God records his name he will meet his people and bless them.*

## Chapter 7

God having set up house (as it were) in the midst of the camp of Israel, the princes of Israel here come a visiting with their presents, as tenants to their landlord, in the name of their respective tribes. I. They brought presents, 1. Upon the dedication of the tabernacle, for the service of that (v. 1-9). 2. Upon the dedication of the altar, for the use of that (v. 10-88). And, II. God graciously signified his acceptance of them (v. 89). The two foregoing chapters were the records of additional laws which God gave to Israel, this is the history of the additional services which Israel performed to God.

### Verses 1-9

Here is the offering of the princes to the service of the tabernacle. Observe,

- I. When it was; not till it was *fully set up*, v. 1. When all things were done both about the tabernacle itself, and the camp of Israel which surrounded it, according to the directions given, then they began their presents, probably about the eighth day of the second month. Note, Necessary observances must always take place of free-will offerings: first those, and then these.
- II. Who it was that offered: *The princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers*, v. 2. Note, Those that are above others in power and dignity ought to go before others, and endeavour to go beyond them, in every thing that is good. The more any are advanced the more is expected from them, on account of the greater opportunity they have of serving God and their generation. What are wealth and authority good for, but as they enable a man to do so much the more good in the world?
- III. What was offered: six wagons, with each of them a yoke of oxen to draw them, v. 3. Doubtless these wagons were agreeable to the rest of the furniture of the tabernacle and its appurtenances, the best of the kind, like the carriages which great princes use when they go in procession. Some think that God, by Moses, intimated to them what they should bring, or their own consideration perhaps suggested to them to make this present. Though God's wisdom had ordained all the essentials of the tabernacle, yet it seems these accidental conveniences were left to be provided by their own discretion, which was to set in order that which was wanting (Tit. 1:5), and these wagons were not refused, though no pattern of them was shown to Moses in the mount. Note, It must not be expected that the divine institution of ordinances should descend to all those circumstances which are determinable, and are fit to be left alterable, by human prudence, that wisdom which is profitable to direct. Observe, No sooner is the tabernacle fully set up than this provision is made for the removal of it. Note, Even when we are but just settled in the world, and think we are beginning to take root, we must be preparing for changes and removes, especially for the great change. While we are here in this world, every thing must be accommodated to a militant and movable state. When the tabernacle was framing, the princes were very generous in their offerings, for then they brought *precious stones, and stones to be set* (Ex. 35:27), yet now they bring more presents. Note, Those that have done good should study to abound therein yet more and more, and not be *weary of well-doing*.
- IV. How the offering was disposed of, and what use was made of it: the wagons and oxen were given to the Levites, to be used in carrying the tabernacle, both for their ease (for God would not have any of his servants overburdened with work), and for the more safe and right conveyance of the several parts of the tabernacle, which would be best kept together, and sheltered

from the weather, in wagons. 1. The Gershonites, that had the light carriage, the curtains and hangings, had but two wagons, and two yoke of oxen (v. 7); when they had loaded these, they must carry the rest, if any remained, upon their shoulders. 2. The Merarites, that had the heavy carriage, and that which was most unwieldy, the boards, pillars, sockets, etc., had four wagons, and four yoke of oxen allotted them (v. 8); and yet, if they had not more wagons of their own, they would be obliged to carry a great deal upon their backs too, for the silver sockets alone weighed 100 talents, which was above four tons, and that was enough to load four wagons that were drawn but by one yoke of oxen a-piece. But each socket being a talent weight, which is about a man's burden (as appears, 2 Ki. 5:23) probably they carried those on their backs, and put the boards and pillars into the wagons. Observe here, How God wisely and graciously ordered the most strength to those that had the most work. Each had wagons *according to their service*. Whatever burden God in his providence lays upon us, he will by his sufficient grace proportion the strength to it, 1 Co. 10:13. 3. The Kohathites, that had the most sacred carriage, had no wagons at all, because they were to carry their charge upon their shoulders (v. 9), with a particular care and veneration. When in David's time they carried the ark in a cart, God made them to know to their terror, by the death of Uzza, that they did not *seek him in the due order*. See 1 Chr. 15:13.

### **Verses 10-89**

We have here an account of the great solemnity of dedicating the altars, both that of burnt-offerings and that of incense; they had been sanctified before, when they were anointed (Lev. 8:10, 11), but now they were handselled, as it were, by the princes, with their free-will offerings. They began the use of them with rich presents, great expressions of joy and gladness, and extraordinary respect to those tokens of God's presence with them. Now observe here,

I. That the princes and great men were first and forwardest in the service of God. Those that are entitled to precedency should go before in good works, and that is true honour. Here is an example to the nobility and gentry, those that are in authority and of the first rank in their country; they ought to improve their honour and power, their estate and interest, for the promoting of religion, and the service of God, in the places where they live. It is justly expected that those who have more than others should do more good than others with what they have, else they are unfaithful stewards, and will not make up their *account with joy*. Nay, great men must not only with their wealth and power assist and protect those that serve God, but they must make conscience of being devout and religious themselves, and employing themselves in the exercises of piety, which will greatly redound to the honour of God (Ps. 138:4, 5), and have a good influence upon others, who will be the more easily persuaded to acts of devotion when they see them thus brought into reputation. It is certain that the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God; nor are the meanest services of religion any disparagement to those that make the greatest figure in the world.

II. The offerings they brought were very rich and valuable, so rich that some think there was not so great a difference in estate between them and others as that they were able to bear the expense of them themselves, but that the heads of each tribe contributed to the offering which their prince brought.

1. They brought some things to remain for standing service, twelve large silver dishes, each about sixty ounces weight, as

many large silver cups, or bowls, of about thirty-five ounces—the former to be used for the meat-offerings, the latter for the drink-offerings—the former for the flesh of the sacrifices, the latter for the blood. The latter was God's table (as it were), and it was fit that so great a King should be served in plate. The golden spoons being filled with incense were intended, it is probable, for the service of the golden altar, for both the altars were anointed at the same time. Note, In works of piety and charity we ought to be generous according as our ability is. He that is the best should be served with the best we have. The Israelites indeed might well afford to part with their gold and silver in abundance to the service of the sanctuary, for they needed it not to buy meat and victual their camp, being daily fed with bread from heaven; nor did they need it to buy land, or pay their army, for they were shortly to be put in possession of Canaan.

2. They brought some things to be used immediately, offerings of each sort, burnt-offerings, sin-offerings, and a great many peace-offerings (on part of which they were to feast with their friends), and the meat-offerings that were to be annexed to them. Hereby they signified their thankful acceptance of, and cheerful submission to, all those laws concerning the sacrifices which God had lately by Moses delivered to them. And, though it was a time of joy and rejoicing, yet it is observable that still in the midst of their sacrifices we find a *sin-offering*. Since in our best services we are conscious to ourselves that there is a mixture of sin, it is fit that there should be even in our most joyful services a mixture of repentance. In all our approaches to God, we must by faith have an eye to Christ as the great sin-offering, and make mention of him.

3. They brought their offerings each on a separate day, in the order that they had been lately put into, so that the solemnity lasted twelve days. So God appointed (v. 11): *They shall bring their offering, each prince on his day*, and so they did. One sabbath must needs fall within the twelve days, if not two, but it should seem they did not intermit on the sabbath, for it was holy work, proper enough for a holy day. God appointed that it should thus be done on several days, (1.) That solemnity might be prolonged, and so might be universally taken notice of by all Israel, and the remembrance of it more effectually preserved. (2.) That an equal honour might thereby be put upon each tribe respectively; in Aaron's breast-plate each had his precious stone, so in this offering each had his day. (3.) Thus it would be done more decently and in order; God's work should not be done confusedly, and in a hurry; take time, and we shall have done the sooner, or at least we shall have done the better. (4.) God hereby signified how much pleased he is, and how much pleased we should be, with the exercises of piety and devotion. The repetition of them should be a continual pleasure to us, and we must not be weary of well doing. If extraordinary service be required to be done for twelve days together, we must not shrink from it, nor call it a task and a burden. (5.) The priests and Levites, having this occasion to offer the same sacrifices, and those some of every sort, every day, for so many days together, would have their hands well set in, and would be well versed in the laws concerning them. (6.) The peace-offerings were all to be eaten the same day they were offered, and two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs, were enough for one day's festival; had there been more, especially if all had been brought on one day, there might have been danger of excess. The virtue of temperance must not be left, under pretence of the religion of feasting.

4. All their offerings were exactly the same, without any variation, though it is probable that neither the princes nor the tribes were all alike rich; but thus it was intimated that all the tribes of Israel had an equal share in the altar, and an equal interest in

the sacrifices that were offered upon it. Though one tribe was posted more honourably in the camp than another, yet they and their services were all alike acceptable to God. Nor must we have faith of our Lord Jesus Christ *with respect to persons*, Jam. 2:1.

5. Nahshon, the prince of the tribe of Judah, offered first, because God had given that tribe the first post of honour in the camp; and the rest of the tribes acquiesced, and offered in the same order in which God had appointed them to encamp. Judah, of which tribe Christ came, first, and then the rest; thus, in the dedication of souls to God, every man is presented in his own order, *Christ the first-fruits*, 1 Co. 15:23. Some observe that Nahshon is the only one that is not expressly called a prince (v. 12), which the Jews give this account of: he is not called a prince, that he might not be puffed up because he offered first; and all the others are called princes because they (though some of them of the elder house) submitted, and offered after him. Or, because the title of prince of Judah did more properly belong to Christ, for *unto him shall the gathering of the people be*.

6. Though the offerings were all the same, yet the account of them is repeated at large for each tribe, in the same words. We are sure there are no vain repetitions in scripture; what then shall we make of these repetitions? Might it not have served to say of this noble jury that the same offering which their foreman brought each on his day brought likewise? No, God would have it specified for each tribe: and why so? (1.) It was for the encouragement of these princes, and of their respective tribes, that each of their offerings being recorded at large no slight might seem to be put upon them; for rich and poor meet together before God. (2.) It was for the encouragement of all generous acts of piety and charity, by letting us know that what is so given is lent to the Lord, and he carefully records it, with every one's name prefixed to his gift, because what is so given he will pay again, and even a *cup of cold water* shall have its *reward*. He is not unrighteous, to forget either the cost or the *labour of love*, Heb. 6:10. We find Christ taking particular notice of what was cast into the treasury, Mk. 12:41. Though what is offered be but little, though it be a contribution to the charity of others, yet if it be according to our ability it shall be recorded, that it may be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

7. The sum total is added at the foot of the account (v. 84–88), to show how much God was pleased with the mention of his freewill-offerings, and what a great deal they amounted to in the whole, when every prince brought in his quota! How greatly would the sanctuary of God be enriched and beautified if all would in their places do their part towards it, by exemplary purity and devotion, extensive charity, and universal usefulness!

8. God signified his gracious acceptance of these presents that were brought him, by speaking familiarly to Moses, as a man speaks to his friend, from off the mercy-seat (v. 89, ch. 12:8); and in speaking to him he did in effect speak to all Israel, showing them this token for good, Ps. 103:7. Note, By this we may know that God hears and accepts our prayers if he gives us grace to hear and receive his word, for thus our communion with him is maintained and kept up. I know not why we may not suppose that upon each of the days on which these offerings were brought (probably while the priests and offerers were feasting upon the peace-offerings) Moses was in the tabernacle, receiving some of those laws and orders which we have already met with in this and the foregoing book. And here the excellent bishop Patrick observes that God's speaking to Moses thus by an audible articulate voice, as if he had been clothed with a holy body, might be looked upon as an earnest of the

incarnation of the Son of God in the fulness of time, when the Word should be made flesh, and speak in the language of the sons of men. For, however God *at sundry times and in divers manners spoke unto the fathers, he has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*. And that he who now spoke to Moses, as the *shechinah* or divine Majesty, from between the cherubim, was the eternal Word, the second person in the Trinity, was the pious conjecture of many of the ancients; for all God's communion with man is by his Son, by whom he made the world, and rules the church, and who *is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.

## Chapter 8

This chapter is concerning the lamps or lights of the sanctuary. I. The burning lamps in the candlestick, which the priests were charged to tend (v. 1-4). II. The living lamps (if I may so call them), The Levites, who as ministers were burning and shining lights. The ordination of the priests we had an account of, Lev. 8. Here we have an account of the ordination of the Levites, the inferior clergy. 1. How they were purified (v. 5-8). 2. How they were parted with by the people (v. 9, 10). 3. How they were presented to God in lieu of the firstborn (v. 11-18). 4. How they were consigned to Aaron and his sons, to be ministers to them (v. 19). 5. How all these orders were duly executed (v. 20-22). And, lastly, the age appointed for their ministration (v. 23, etc.).

### Verses 1-4

Directions were given long before this for the making of the golden candlestick (Ex. 25:31), and it was made according to the pattern shown to Moses in the mount, Ex. 38:17. But now it was that the lamps were first ordered to be lighted, when other things began to be used. Observe, 1. Who must light the lamps; Aaron himself, he *lighted the lamps*, v. 3. As the people's representative to God, he thus did the office of a servant in God's house, lighting his Master's candle; as the representative of God to the people, he thus gave them the intimations of God's will and favour, thus expressed (Ps. 18:28), *Thou wilt light my candle*; and thus Aaron himself was now lately directed to bless the people, *The Lord make his face to shine upon thee*, ch. 6:25. The commandment is a *lamp*, Prov. 6:23. The scripture is a *light shining in a dark place*, 2 Pt. 1:19. And a dark place indeed even the church would be without it, as the tabernacle (which had no window in it) without the lamps. Now the work of ministers is to light these lamps, by expounding and applying the word of God. The priest lighted the middle lamp from the fire of the altar, and the rest of the lamps he lighted one from another, which (says Mr. Ainsworth) signifies that the fountain of all light and knowledge is in Christ, who has the *seven spirits of God* figured by the *seven lamps of fire* (Rev. 4:5), but that in the expounding of scripture one passage must borrow light from another. He also supposes that, *seven* being a number of perfection, by the seven branches of the candlestick is shown the full perfection of the scriptures, which are able to make us wise to salvation. 2. To what end the lamps were lighted, that they might give light *over against the candlestick*, that is, to that part of the tabernacle where the table stood, with the show-bread upon it, over against the candlestick. They were not lighted like tapers in an urn, to burn to themselves, but to give light to the other side of the tabernacle, for therefore candles are lighted, Mt. 5:15. Note, The lights of the world, the lights of the church, must shine as lights. Therefore we have light, that we may give light.

### Verses 5-26

We read before of the separating of the Levites from among the children of Israel when they were numbered, and the numbering of them by themselves (ch. 3:6, 15), that they might be employed in the service of the tabernacle. Now here we have directions given for their solemn ordination (v. 6), and the performance of it, v. 20. All Israel must know that they took not this honour to themselves, but were called of God to it; nor was it enough that they were distinguished from their neighbours, but they must be solemnly devoted to God. Note, All that are employed for God must be dedicated to him,

according as the degree of employment is. Christian must be baptized, ministers must be ordained; we must first give ourselves unto the Lord, and then our services. Observe in what method this was done:

I. The Levites must be cleansed, and were so. The rites and ceremonies of their cleansing were to be performed, 1. By themselves. They must *wash their clothes*, and not only bathe, but *shave all their flesh*, as the leper was to do when he was cleansed, Lev. 14:8. They must *cause a razor to pass over all their flesh*, to clear themselves from that defilement which would not wash off. Jacob, whom God loved, was a smooth man; it was Esau that was hairy. The great pains they were to take with themselves to make themselves clean teaches all Christians, and ministers particularly, by repentance and mortification, to *cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, that they may *perfect holiness*. Those must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. 2. By Moses. He must *sprinkle the water of purifying upon them*, which was prepared by divine direction. This signified the application of the blood of Christ to our souls by faith, to purify us from an evil conscience, that we may be fit to serve the living God. It is our duty to cleanse ourselves, and God's promise that he will cleanse us.

II. The Levites, being thus prepared, must be brought before the Lord in a solemn assembly of all Israel, and the *children of Israel* must *put their hands upon them* (v. 10), so transferring their interest in them and in their service (to which, as a part, the whole body of the people was entitled) to God and to his sanctuary. They presented them to God *as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable*, to perform a *reasonable service*; and therefore, as the offerers in all other cases did, *they laid their hands upon them*, desiring that their service might be accepted in lieu of the attendance of the whole congregation, particularly the first-born, which they acknowledge God might have insisted on. This will not serve to prove a power in the people to ordain ministers; for this imposition of hands by the children of Israel upon the Levites did not make them ministers of the sanctuary, but only signified the people's parting with that tribe out of their militia, and civil incorporations, in order to their being made ministers by Aaron, who was to offer them before the Lord. All the congregation of the children of Israel could not lay hands on them, but it is probable that the rulers and elders did it as the representative body of the people. Some think that the first-born did it because in their stead the Levites were consecrated to God. Whatever God calls for from us to serve his own glory by, we must cheerfully resign it, lay our hands upon it, not to detain it but to surrender it, and let it go to him that is entitled to it.

III. Sacrifices were to be offered for them, a sin-offering first (v. 12), and then a burnt-offering, to make an *atonement for the Levites*, who, as the parties concerned, were to lay their hands upon the head of the sacrifices. See here, 1. That we are all utterly unworthy and unfit to be admitted into and employed in the service of God, till atonement be made for sin, and thereby our peace made with God. That interposing cloud must be scattered before there can be any comfortable communion settled between God and our souls. 2. That it is by sacrifice, by Christ the great sacrifice, that we are reconciled to God, and made fit to be offered to him. It is by him that Christians are sanctified to the work of their Christianity, and ministers to the work of their ministry. The learned bishop Patrick's notion of the sacrifice offered by the Levites is that the Levites were themselves considered as an expiatory sacrifice, for they were given to *make atonement for the children of Israel*, (v. 19), and yet not being devoted to death, any more than the first-born were, these two sacrifices were substituted in their stead, upon which

therefore they were to lay their hands, that the sin which the children of Israel laid upon them (v. 10) might be transferred to these beasts.

IV. The Levites themselves were *offered before the Lord* for an *offering of the children of Israel*, v. 11. Aaron gave them up to God, as being first given up by themselves, and by the children of Israel. The original word signifies a *wave-offering*, not that they were actually waved, but they were presented to God as the God of heaven, and the Lord of the whole earth, as the wave-offerings were. And in calling them wave-offerings it was intimated to them that they must continually lift up themselves towards God in his service, lift up their eyes, lift up their hearts, and must move to and fro with readiness in the business of their profession. They were not ordained to be idle, but to be active and stirring.

V. God here declares his acceptance of them: *The Levites shall be mine*, v. 14. God took them instead of the first-born (v. 16–18), of which before, ch. 3:41. Note, What is in sincerity offered to God shall be graciously owned and accepted by him. And his ministers who have obtained mercy of him to be faithful have particular marks of favour and honour put upon them: *they shall be mine*, and then (v. 15) they shall *go in to do the service of the tabernacle*. God takes them for his own, that they may serve him. All that 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, on the other hand, none are taken merely as honorary servants, to do nothing. All whom God owns he employs; angels themselves have their services.

VI. They are then given as a gift to Aaron and his sons (v. 19), yet so as that the benefit accrued to the children of Israel. 1. The Levites must act under the priests as attendants on them, and assistants to them, in the service of the sanctuary. Aaron offers them to God (v. 11), and then God gives them back to Aaron, v. 19. Note, Whatever we give up to God, he will give back to us unspeakably to our advantage. Our hearts, our children, our estates, are never more ours, more truly, more comfortably ours, than when we have offered them up to God. 2. They must act for the people. They were taken to *do the service of the children of Israel*, that is, not only to do the service which they should do, but to serve their interests, and do that which would really redound to the honour, safety, and prosperity of the whole nation. Note, Those that faithfully perform the service of God do one of the best services that can be done to the public; God's ministers, while they keep within the sphere of their office and conscientiously discharge the duty of it, must be looked upon as some of the most useful servants of their country. The children of Israel can as ill spare the tribe of Levi as any of their tribes. But what is the service they do the children of Israel? It follows, it is to *make an atonement for them, that there be no plague among them*. It was the priests' work to make atonement by sacrifice, but the Levites made atonement by attendance, and preserved the peace with heaven which was made by sacrifice. If the service of the priests in the tabernacle had been left to all the first-born of Israel promiscuously, it would have been either neglected or done unskillfully and irreverently, being done by those that were not so closely tied to it, nor so diligently trained to it, nor so constantly used to it, as the Levites were; and this would bring *a plague among the children of Israel*—meaning, perhaps, the death of the first-born themselves, which was the last and greatest of the plagues of Egypt. To prevent this, and to preserve the atonement, the Levites were appointed to do this service, who should be bred up to it under their parents from

their infancy, and therefore would be well versed in it; and so the children of Israel, that is, the first-born, should not need to come nigh to the sanctuary; or, when any Israelites had occasion, the Levites would be ready to instruct them, and introduce them, and so prevent any fatal miscarriage or mistake. Note, It is a very great kindness to the church that ministers are appointed to go before the people in the things of God, as guides, overseers, and rulers, in religious worship, and to make that their business. When Christ ascended on high, he *gave these gifts*, Eph. 4:8, 11, 12.

VII. The time of their ministration is fixed. 1. They were to enter upon the service at twenty-five years old, v. 24. They were not charged with the carrying of the tabernacle and the utensils of it till they were thirty years old, ch. 4:3. But they were entered to be otherwise serviceable at twenty-five years old, a very good age for ministers to begin their public work at. The work then required that strength of body and the work now requires that maturity of judgment and steadiness of behaviour which men rarely arrive at till about that age; and novices are in danger of being lifted up with pride. 2. They were to have a writ of ease at fifty years old; then they were to return from the warfare, as the phrase is (v. 25), not cashiered with disgrace, but preferred rather to the rest which their age required, to be loaded with the honours of their office, as hitherto they had been with the burdens of it. They shall *minister with their brethren in the tabernacle*, to direct the junior Levites, and set them in; and they shall *keep the charge*, as guards upon the avenues of the tabernacle, to see that no stranger intruded, nor any person in his uncleanness, but they shall not be put upon any service which may be a fatigue to them. If God's grace provide that men shall have ability according to their work, man's prudence should take care that men have work only according to their ability. The aged are most fit for trusts, and to keep the charge; the younger are most fit for work, and to do the service. Those that have *used the office of a servant well purchase to themselves a good degree*, 1 Tim. 3:13. Yet indeed gifts are not tied to ages (Job 32:9), but *all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit*. Thus was the affair of the Levites settled.

## Chapter 9

This chapter is, I. Concerning the great ordinance of the passover; 1. Orders given for the observance of it, at the return of the year (v. 1-5). 2. Provisos added in regard to such as should be ceremonially unclean, or otherwise disabled, at the time when the passover was to be kept (v. 6–14). II. Concerning the great favour of the pillar of cloud, which was a guide to Israel through the wilderness (v. 15, etc.).

### Verses 1-14

Here we have,

I. An order given for the solemnization of the passover, the day twelvemonth after they came out of Egypt, on the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year, some days before they were numbered, for that was done in the beginning of the second month. Observe, 1. God gave particular orders for the keeping of this passover, otherwise (it should seem) they would not have kept it, for, in the first institution of this ordinance, it was appointed to be kept when they should *come into the land of promise*, Ex. 12:25. And, no passover till they came to Canaan, Jos. 5:10. This was an early indication of the abolishing of the ceremonial institutions at last, that, so soon after they were first appointed, some of them were suffered to lie asleep for so many years. The ordinance of the Lord's supper (which came in the room of the passover) was not thus intermitted or set aside in the first days of the Christian church, though 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 afterwards. The Israelites in the wilderness could not forget their deliverance out of Egypt, their present state was a constant memorandum of it to them. All the danger was when they came to Canaan; there therefore they had need to be reminded of the *rock out of which they were hewn*. However, because the first passover was celebrated in a hurry, and was rather the substance itself than the sign, it was the will of God that at the return of the year, when they were more composed, and better acquainted with the divine law, they should observe it again, that their children might more distinctly understand the solemnity and the better remember it hereafter. Calvin supposes that they were obliged to keep it now, and notes it as an instance of their carelessness that they had need to be reminded of an institution which they so lately received. 2. Moses faithfully transmitted to the people the orders given him, v. 4. Thus Paul delivered to the churches what he *received of the Lord* concerning the gospel passover, 1 Co. 11:23. Note, Magistrates must be monitors, and ministers must *stir up men's minds by way of remembrance* to that which is good. 3. The people observed the orders given them, v. 5. Though they had lately kept the feast of dedication (ch. 7), yet they did not desire to excuse themselves with that from keeping this feast. Note, Extraordinary performances must not supersede or jostle out or stated services. They kept the passover even in the wilderness: though our condition be solitary and unsettled, yet we must keep up our attendance on God by holy ordinances as we have opportunity, for in them we may find the best conversation and the best repose. Thus is God' Israel provided for in a desert.

II. Instructions given concerning those that were ceremonially unclean when they were to eat the passover. The law of the

passover required every Israelite to eat of it. Some subsequent laws had forbidden those that had contracted any ceremonial pollution to eat of the holy things; those whose minds and consciences are defiled by sin are utterly unfit for communion with God, and cannot partake, with any true comfort, of the gospel passover, till they are cleansed by true repentance and faith: and a sad dilemma they are in; if they come not to holy ordinances, they are guilty of a contempt of them; if they do come in their pollution, they are guilty of a profanation of them. They must therefore wash, and then *compass God's altar*. Now,

1. Here is the case that happened in Israel when this passover was to be kept: *Certain men were defiled by the dead body of a man* (v. 6), and they lay under that defilement seven days (ch. 19:11), and in that time might not eat of the holy things, Lev. 7:20. This was not their iniquity, but their infelicity: some persons must touch dead bodies, to bury them out of sight, and therefore they could, with the better grace, bring their complaint to Moses.

2. The application made to Moses by the person concerned, v. 7. Note, It is people's wisdom, in difficult cases concerning sin and duty, to consult with their ministers whom God has set over them, and to *ask the law at their mouth*, Mal. 2:7. These means we must use in pursuance of our prayers to God to lead us in a plain path. Observe with what trouble and concern these men complained that they were kept back from offering to the Lord. They did not complain of the law as unjust, but lamented their unhappiness that they fell under the restraint of it at this time, and desired some expedient might be found out for their relief. Note, It is a blessed thing to see people hungering and thirsting after God's ordinances, and to hear them complaining of that which prevents their enjoyment of them. It should be a trouble to us when by any occasion we are kept back from bringing our offering in the solemnities of a sabbath or a sacrament, as it was to David when he was banished from the altar, Ps. 42:1, 2.

3. The deliberation of Moses in resolving this case. Here seemed to be law against law; and, though it is a rule that the latter law must explain the former, yet he pitied these Israelites that were thus deprived of the privilege of the passover, and therefore took time to consult the oracles, and to know what was the mind of God in this case: *I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you*, v. 8. Ministers must take example hence in resolving cases of conscience. (1.) They must not determine rashly, but take time to consider, that every circumstance may be duly weighted, the case viewed in a true light, and spiritual things compared with spiritual. (2.) They must ask counsel at God's mouth, and not determine according to the bias of their own fancy or affection, but impartially, according to the mind of God, to the best of their knowledge. We have no such oracle to consult as Moses had, but we must have recourse to *the law and the testimony*, and speak according to that rule; and if, in difficult cases, we take time to spread the matter in particular before God by humble believing prayer, we have reason to hope that the Spirit who is promised to *lead us into all truth* will enable us to direct others *in the good and right way*.

4. The directions which God gave in this case, and in other similar cases, explanatory of the law of the passover. The disagreeable accident produced good laws. (1.) Those that happened to be ceremonially unclean at the time when the passover should be eaten were allowed to eat it that day month, when they were clean; so were those that happened to be *in a journey afar off*, v. 10, 11. See here, [1.] That when we are to attend upon God in solemn ordinances it is very necessary both that we be clean and that we be composed. [2.] That that may excuse the deferring of a duty for a time which yet will not justify us in the total neglect and omission of it. He that is at variance with his brother may *leave his gift before the altar*, while he goes to

*be reconciled to his brother*; but when he has done his part towards it, whether it be effected or no, he must *come again and offer his gift*, Mt. 5:23, 24. This secondary passover was to be kept on the same day of the month with the first, because the ordinance was a memorial of their deliverance on that day of the month. Once we find the whole congregation keeping the passover on this fourteenth day of the second month, in Hezekiah's time (2 Chr. 30:15), which perhaps may help to account for the admission of some that were not clean to the eating of it. Had the general passover been kept in the first month, the unclean might have been put off till the second; but, that being kept in the second month, they had no warrant to eat it in the third month, and therefore, rather than not eat of it at all, they were admitted, though not cleansed *according to the purification of the sanctuary*, v. 19, 20. (2.) Whenever the passover was kept in the second month, all the rites and ceremonies of it must be strictly observed, v. 12. They must not think that, because the time was dispensed with, any part of the solemnity of it might be abated; when we cannot do as we would we must do the utmost we can in the service of God. (3.) This allowance in a case of necessity would be no means countenance or indulge any in their neglect to keep the passover at the time appointed, when they were not under the necessity, v. 13. When a person is under no incapacity to eat the passover in the appointed time, if he neglects it then, upon the presumption of the liberty granted by this law, he puts an affront upon God, impiously abuses his kindness, and he shall certainly *bear his sin, and be cut off from his people*. Note, As those who against their minds are forced to absent themselves from God's ordinances may comfortably expect the favours of God's grace under their affliction, so those who of choice absent themselves may justly expect the tokens of God's wrath for their sin. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*. (4.) Here is a clause added in favour of strangers, v. 14. Though it was requisite that the stranger who would join with them in eating the passover should be circumcised as a proselyte to their religion (Ex. 12:48, 49), yet this kind admission of those that were not native Israelites to eat the passover was an intimation of the favour designed for the poor Gentiles by Christ. As then there was one law, so in the days of the Messiah there should be one gospel, for the stranger and for him that was born in the land; for *in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him*, and this was a truth before Peter perceived it, Acts 10:34, 35.

### **Verses 15-23**

We have here the history of the cloud; not a natural history: *who knows the balancings of the clouds?* but a divine history of a cloud that was appointed to be the visible sign and symbol of God's presence with Israel.

I. When the tabernacle was finished this cloud, which before had hung on high over their camp, settled upon the tabernacle, and covered it, to show that God manifests his presence with his people in and by his ordinances; there he makes himself known, and to them we must look if we would *see the beauty of the Lord*, Ps. 27:4; Eze. 37:26, 27. Thus God glorified his own appointments, and signified his acceptance of his people's love and obedience.

II. That which appeared as a cloud by day appeared as a fire all night. Had it been a cloud only, it would not have been visible by night; and, had it been a fire only, it would have been scarcely discernible by day; but God would give them sensible demonstrations of the constancy of his presence with them, and his care of them, and that he *kept them night and day*, Isa. 27:3; Ps. 121:6. And thus we are taught to *set God always before us*, and to see him near us both night and day. Something of

the nature of that divine revelation which the Old-Testament church was governed by might also be signified by these visible signs of God's presence, the cloud denoting the darkness and the fire the terror of that dispensation, in comparison with the more clear and comfortable discoveries God has made of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

III. This pillar of cloud and fire directed and determined all the motions, marches, and encampments, of Israel in the wilderness. 1. As long as the cloud rested upon the tabernacle, so long they continued in the same place, and never stirred; though no doubt they were very desirous to be pressing forward in their journey towards Canaan, where they longed to be and hoped to be quickly, yet as long as the cloud rested, if it was a month or a year, so long they rested, v. 22. Note, He that believeth doth not make haste. There is no time lost while we are waiting God's time. It is as acceptable a piece of submission to the will of God to sit still contentedly when our lot requires it as to work for him when we are called to it. 2. When the cloud was taken up, they removed, how comfortably soever they were encamped, v. 17. Whether it moved by day or night, they delayed not to attend its motions (v. 21), and probably there were some appointed to stand sentinel day and night within sight of it, to give timely notice to the camp of its beginning to stir, and this called *keeping the charge of the Lord*. The people, being thus kept at a constant uncertainty, and having no time fixed for stopping or removing, were obliged to hold themselves in constant readiness to march upon very short warning. And for the same reason 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 commandment of the Lord*. 3. As long and as far as the cloud moved, so long and so far they marched, and just where it abode they pitched their tents about it, and God's tent under it, v. 17. Note, It is uncomfortable staying when God has departed, but very safe and pleasant going when we see God go before us and resting where he appoints us to rest. This is repeated again and again in these verses, because it was a constant miracle, and often repeated, and what never failed in all their travels, and because it is a matter which we should take particular notice of as very significant and instructive. It is mentioned long after by David (Ps. 105:39), and by the people of God after their captivity, Neh. 9:19. And the guidance of this cloud is spoken of as signifying the guidance of the blessed Spirit. Isa. 63:14, *The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest, and so didst thou lead thy people*. This teaches us, (1.) The particular care God takes of his people. Nothing could be more expressive and significant of God's tenderness of Israel than the guidance of this cloud was; it led them by the *right way* (Ps. 107:7), went on their pace: God did by it, as it were, cover them with his feathers. We are not now to expect such sensible tokens of the divine presence and guidance as this was, but the promise is sure to all God's spiritual Israel that he will *guide them by his counsel* (Ps. 73:24), *even unto death* (Ps. 48:14), that all the children of God shall be *led by the Spirit of God* (Rom. 8:14), that he will *direct the paths* of those who in *all their ways acknowledge him*, Prov. 3:6. There is a particular providence conversant about all their affairs, to direct and overrule them for the best. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord*, Ps. 37:23. (2.) The particular regard we ought to have to God in all our ways. In our affections and actions we must follow the direction of his word and Spirit; all the motions of our souls must be guided by the divine will; at the commandment of the Lord our hearts should always move and rest; in all our affairs we must follow Providence, reconciling ourselves to all its disposals, and bringing our mind to our condition, whatever it is. The people of Israel, having the cloud for their guide, were eased of the trouble of holding councils of war, to consider when and

whither they should march, which might have occasioned strifes and debates among them: nor needed they to send spies before to inform them of the posture of the country, or pioneers to clear the way, or officers to mark out their camp; the pillar of cloud did all this for them: and those that by faith commit their works to the Lord, though they are bound to the prudent use of means, yet may in like manner be easy in the expectation of the event. "*Father, thy will be done; dispose of me and mine as thou pleasest; here I am, desirous to be found waiting on my God continually, to journey and rest at the commandment of the Lord. What thou wilt, and where thou wilt, only let me be thine, and always in the way of my duty.*"

## Chapter 10

In this chapter we have, I. Orders given about the making and using of silver trumpets, which seems to have been the last of all the commandments God gave upon mount Sinai, and one of the least, yet not without its significancy (v. 1–10). II. The history of the removal of Israel's camp from mount Sinai, and their orderly march into the wilderness of Paran (v. 11–28). III. Moses's treaty with Hobab, his brother-in-law (v. 29–32). IV. Moses's prayer at the removing and resting of the ark (v. 33, etc.).

### Verses 1-10

We have here directions concerning the public notices that were to be given to the people upon several occasions by sound of trumpet. In a thing of this nature, one would think, Moses needed not to have been taught of God: his own reason might teach him the conveniency of trumpets; but the constitution of Israel was to be in every thing divine, and therefore even in this matter, small as it seems. Moses is here directed, 1. About the making of them. They must be made of silver; not cast but of beaten work (as some read it), the matter and shape, no doubt, very fit for the purpose. He was now ordered to make but two, because there were but two priests to use them. But in Solomon's time we read of 120 *priests sounding with trumpets*, 2 Chr. 5:12. The form of these trumpets is supposed to have been much like ours at this day. 2. Who were to make use of them; not any inferior person, but the priests themselves, the *sons of Aaron*, v. 8. As great as they were, they must not think it a disparagement to them to be trumpeters in the house of God; the meanest office there was honourable. This signified that the Lord's ministers should *lift up their voice like a trumpet*, to show people their sins (Isa. 58:1), to call them to Christ, Isa. 27:13. 3. Upon what occasions the trumpets were to be sounded. (1.) For the *calling of assemblies*, v. 2. Thus they are told to blow the trumpet in Zion for the calling of a solemn assembly together, to sanctify a fast, Joel 2:15. Public notice ought to be given of the time and place of religious assemblies; for the invitation to the benefit or ordinances is general: *whoever will, let him come*. wisdom cries in the chief places of concourse. But, that the trumpet might not *give an uncertain sound*, they are directed, if only the princes and elders were to meet, to blow but one of the trumpets; less should serve to call *them* together, who ought to be examples of forwardness in any thing that is good: but, if the body of the people were to be called together, both the trumpets must be sounded, that they might be heard at the greater distance. In allusion to this, they are said to be blessed that *hear the joyful sound* (Ps. 89:15), that is, that are invited and called upon to wait upon God in public ordinances, Ps. 122:1. And the general assembly at the great day will be summoned by *the sound of the archangel's trumpet*, Mt. 24:31. (2.) For the *journeying of the camps*, to give notice when each squadron must move; for no man's voice could reach to give the word of command: soldiers with us that are well disciplined may be exercised by beat of drums. When the trumpets were blown for this purpose, they must *sound an alarm* (v. 5), a broken, quavering, interrupted sound, which was proper to excite and encourage the minds of people in their marches against their enemies; whereas a continued equal sound was more proper for the calling of the assembly together (v. 7): yet when the people were called together to deprecate God's judgments we find an alarm sounded, Joel 2:1. At the first sounding, Judah's squadron marched, at the second Reuben's, at the third Ephraim's, at the fourth Dan's, v. 5, 6. And some think that this was intended to sanctify their marches, for thus were proclaimed by the priests, who were God's

mouth to the people, not only the divine orders given them to move, but the divine blessing upon them in all their motions. He that hath ears, let him hear that *God is with them of a truth*. King Abijah valued himself and his army very much upon this (2 Chr. 13:12), *God himself is with us for our captain and his priests with sounding trumpets*. (3.) For the animating and encouraging of their armies, when they went out in battle (v. 9): *"If you go to war, blow with the trumpets*, signifying thereby your appeal to heaven for the decision of the controversy, and your prayer to God to give you victory; and God will own this his own institution, and *you shall be remembered before the Lord your God.*" God will take notice of this sound of the trumpet, and be engaged to fight their battles, and let all the people take notice of it, and be encouraged to fight his, as David, when he heard *a sound of a going upon the tops of the mulberry trees*. Not that God needed to be awaked by sound of trumpet any more than Christ needed to be awaked by his disciples in the storm, Mt. 8:25. But where he intends mercy it is his will that we should solicit it; ministers must stir up the good soldiers of Jesus Christ to fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil, by assuring them that Christ is the *captain of their salvation*, and will *tread Satan under their feet*. (4.) For the solemnizing of their sacred feasts, v. 10. One of their feasts was called *a memorial of the blowing of trumpets*, Lev. 23:23, etc. And it should seem they were thus to grace the solemnity of all their feasts (Ps. 81:3), and their sacrifices (2 Chr. 29:27), to intimate with what joy and delight they performed their duty to God, and to raise the minds of those that attended the services to a holy triumph in the God they worshipped. And then their performances were for a *memorial before God*; for he takes pleasure in our religious exercises when we take pleasure in them. Holy work should be done with holy joy.

### **Verses 11-28**

Here is, I. A general account of the removal of the camp of Israel from mount Sinai, before which mountain it had lain now about a year, in which time and place a great deal of memorable business was done. Of this removal, it should seem, God gave them notice some time before (Deu. 1:6, 7): *You have dwelt long enough in this mountain, turn you and take your journey towards the land of promise*. The apostle tells us that *mount Sinai genders to bondage* (Gal. 4:24), and signifies the law there given, which is of use indeed as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, yet we must not rest in it, but advance towards the joys and liberties of the children of God, for our happiness is conferred not by the law, but by promise. Observe, 1. The signal given (v. 11): *The cloud was taken up*, and we may suppose it stood for some time, till they were ready to march; and a great deal of work it was to take down all those tents, and pack up all those goods that they had there; but every family being employed about its own, and all at the same time, many hands made quick work of it. 2. The march began: *They took their journey according to the commandment of the Lord*, and just as the cloud led them, v. 13. Some think that mention is thus frequently made in this and the foregoing chapter of the *commandment of the Lord*, guiding and governing them in all their travels, to obviate the calumny and reproach which were afterwards thrown upon Israel, that they tarried so long in the wilderness, because they had lost themselves there, and could not find the way out. No, the matter was not so; in every stage, in every step, they were under divine direction; and, if they knew not where they were, yet he that led them knew. Note, Those that have given up themselves to the direction of God's word and Spirit steer a steady course, even when they seem to be bewildered. While they are sure they cannot lose their God and guide, they need not fear losing their way. 3. The place they rested in, after

three days' march: They went *out of the wilderness of Sinai*, and rested *in the wilderness of Paran*. Note, All our removals in this world are but from one wilderness to another. The changes which we think will be for the better do not always prove so; while we carry about with us, wherever we go, the common infirmities of human nature, we must expect, wherever we go, to meet with its common calamities; we shall never be at rest, never at home, till we come to heaven, and all will be well there.

II. A particular draught of the order of their march, according to the late model. 1. Judah's squadron marched first, v. 14–16. The leading standard, now lodged with that tribe, was an earnest of the sceptre which in David's time should be committed to it, and looked further to the captain of our salvation, of whom it was likewise foretold that *unto him should the gathering of the people be*. 2. Then came those two families of the Levites which were entrusted to carry the tabernacle. As soon as ever the cloud was taken up, the tabernacle was taken down, and packed up for removing, v. 17. And here the six wagons came laden with the more bulky part of the tabernacle. This frequent removing of the tabernacle in all their journeys signified the movableness of that ceremonial dispensation. That which was so often shifted would at length vanish away, Heb. 8:13. 3. Reuben's squadron marched forward next, taking place after Judah, *according to the commandment of the Lord*, v. 18–20. 4. Then the Kohathites followed with their charge, the sacred furniture of the tabernacle, *in the midst of the camp*, the safest and most honourable place, v. 21. And they (that is, says the margin, the Gershonites and Merarites) did *set up the tabernacle against they came*; and perhaps it is expressed thus generally because, if there was occasion, not those Levites only, but the other Israelites that were in the first squadron, lent a hand to the tabernacle to hasten the rearing of it up, even before they set up their own tents. 5. Ephraim's squadron followed next after the ark (v. 22–24), to which some think the psalmist alludes when he prays (Ps. 80:2), *Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh*, the three tribes that composed this squadron, *stir up thy strength* (and the ark is called his strength, Ps. 78:61), *and come and save us*. 6. Dan's squadron followed last, v. 25–27. It is called the *rearward*, or *gathering host*, of all the camps, because it gathered up all that were left behind; not the women and children (these we may suppose were taken care of by the heads of their families in their respective tribes), but all the unclean, the mixed multitude, and all that were weak and feeble, and cast behind in their march. Note, He that leadeth Joseph like a flock has a tender regard to the hindmost (Eze. 34:16), that cannot keep pace with the rest, and *of all that are given him he will lose none*, Jn. 17:11.

### **Verses 29-36**

Here is, I. An account of what passed between Moses and Hobab, now upon this advance which the camp of Israel made towards Canaan. Some think that Hobab was the same with Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, and that the story, Ex. 18, should come in here; it seems more probable that Hobab was the son of Jethro, *alias* Reuel, or Raguel (Ex. 2:18), and that when the father, being aged, went to his own land (Ex. 18:27), he left his son Hobab with Moses, as Barzillai left Chimham with David; and the same word signifies both a *father-in-law* and a *brother-in-law*. Now this Hobab staid contentedly with Israel while they encamped at mount Sinai, near his own country; but, now that they were removing, he was for going back to his own country and kindred, and his father's house. Here is, 1. The kind invitation Moses gives him to go forward with them to Canaan, v. 29. He tempts him with a promise that they would certainly be kind to him, and puts God's word in for security: *The Lord hath*

*spoken good concerning Israel.* As if he had said, "Come, cast in thy lot among us, and thou shalt fare as we fare; and we have the promise of God that we shall fare well." Note, Those that are bound for the heavenly Canaan should invite and encourage all their friends to go along with them, for we shall have never the less of the treasures of the covenant, and the joys of heaven, for others coming in to share with us. And what argument can be more powerful with us to take God's people for our people than this, that God *hath spoken good concerning them?* It is good having fellowship with those that have fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:3), and going with those with whom God is, Zec. 8:23. 2. Hobab's inclination, and present resolution, to go back to his own country, v. 30. One would have thought that he who had seen so much of the special presence of God with Israel, and such surprising tokens of his favour to them, would not have needed much invitation to embark with them. But his refusal must be imputed to the affection he had for his native air and soil, which was not overpowered, as it ought to have been, by a believing regard to the promise of God and a value for covenant blessings. He was indeed a son of Abraham's loins (for the Midianites descended from Abraham by Keturah), but not an heir of Abraham's faith (Heb. 11:8), else he would not have given Moses this answer. Note, The things of this world, which are seen, draw strongly from the pursuit of the things of the other world, which are not seen. The magnetic virtue of this earth prevails with most people above the attractives of heaven itself. 3. The great importunity Moses used with him to alter his resolution, v. 31, 32. He urges, (1.) That he might be serviceable to them: "*We are to encamp in the wilderness*" (a country well known to Hobab), "*and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes*, not to show us where we must encamp, nor what way we must march" (which the cloud was to direct), "but to show us the conveniences and inconveniences of the place we march through and encamp in, that we may make the best use we can of the conveniences, and the best fence we can against the inconveniences." Note, It will very well consist with our trust in God's providence to make use of the help of our friends in those things wherein they are capable of being serviceable to us. Even those that were led by miracle must not slight the ordinary means of direction. Some think that Moses suggests this to Hobab, not because he expected much benefit from his information, but to please him with the thought of being some way useful to so great a body, and so to draw him on with them, by inspiring him with an ambition to obtain that honour. Calvin gives quite another sense of this place, very agreeably with the original, which yet I do not find taken notice of by any since. "*Leave us not, I pray thee*, but come along, to share with us in the promised land, *for therefore hast thou known our encampment in the wilderness, and hast been to us instead of eyes*; and we cannot make thee amends for sharing with us in our hardships, and doing us so many good offices, unless thou go with us to Canaan. Surely for this reason thou didst set out with us that thou mightest go on with us." Note, Those that have begun well should use that as a reason for their persevering, because otherwise they lose the benefit and recompence of all they have done and suffered. (2.) That they would be kind to him: *What goodness the Lord shall do to us, the same we will do to thee*, v. 32. Note, [1.] We can give only what we receive. We can do no more service and kindness to our friends than God is pleased to put it into the power of our hand to do. This is all we dare promise, to do good as God shall enable us. [2.] Those that share with God's Israel in their labours and hardships shall share with them in their comforts and honours. Those that are willing to take their lot with them in the wilderness shall have their lot with them in Canaan; *if we suffer with them we shall reign with them*, 2 Tim. 2:12; Lu. 22:28, 29.

We do not find any reply that Hobab here made to Moses, and therefore we hope that his silence gave consent, and he did not leave them, but that, when he perceived he might be useful, he preferred that before the gratifying of his own inclination; in this case he left us a good example. And we find (Jdg. 1:16; 1 Sa. 15:6) that his family was no loser by it.

II. An account of the communion between God and Israel in this removal. They left *the mount of the Lord* (v. 33), that Mount Sinai where they had seen his glory and heard his voice, and had been taken into covenant with him (they must not expect that such appearances of God to them as they had there been blessed with should be constant); they departed from that celebrated mountain, which we never read of in scripture any more, unless with reference to these past stories; now farewell, Sinai; *Zion* is the mountain of which God has said. *This is my rest for ever* (Ps. 132:14), and of which we must say so. But when they left the *mount of the Lord* they took with them the *ark of the covenant of the Lord*, by which their stated communion with God was to be kept up. For,

1. By it God did *direct their paths*. The ark of the covenant went before them, some think in *place*, at least in this removal; others think only in *influence*; though it was carried in the midst of the camp, yet the cloud that hovered over it directed all their motions. The ark (that is, the God of the ark) is said to *search out a resting place* for them; not that God's infinite wisdom and knowledge need to make searches, but every place they were directed to was as convenient for them as if the wisest man they had among them had been employed to go before them, and mark out their camp to the best advantage. thus Canaan is said to be a land which God *spied out*, Eze. 20:6.

2. By it they did *in all their ways acknowledge God*, looking upon it as a token of God's presence; when that moved, or rested, they had their eye up unto God. Moses, as the mouth of the congregation, lifted up a prayer, both at the removing and at the resting of the ark; thus their going out and coming in were sanctified by prayer, and it is an example to us to begin and end every day's journey, and every day's work, with prayer.

(1.) Here is his prayer when the ark set forward: *Rise up, Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered*, v. 35. They were now in a desolate country, but they were marching towards an enemy's country, and their dependence was upon God for success and victory in their wars, as well as for direction and supply in the wilderness. David used this prayer long after (Ps. 68:1), for he also fought the Lords' battles. Note, [1.] There are those in the world that are enemies to God, and haters of him: secret and open enemies; enemies to his truths, his laws, his ordinances, his people. [2.] The scattering and defeating of God's enemies is a thing to be earnestly desired, and believably expected, by all the Lord's people. This prayer is a prophecy. Those that persist in rebellion against God are hasting towards their own ruin. [3.] For the scattering and defeating of God's enemies, there needs no more but God's arising. *When God arose to judgment*, the work was soon done, Ps. 76:8, 9. "Rise, Lord, as the sun riseth to scatter the shadows of the night." Christ's rising from the dead scattered his enemies, Ps. 68:18.

(2.) His prayer when the ark rested, v. 36. [1.] That God would cause his people to rest. So some read it, *"Return, O Lord, the many thousands of Israel, return them to their rest again after this fatigue."* Thus it is said (Isa. 63:14), *The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest*. Thus he prays that God would give Israel success and victory abroad, and peace and tranquillity at home. [2.] That God himself would take up his rest among them. So we read it: *Return to the thousands of Israel, the ten thousand*

*thousand*, so the word is. Note, *First*, The church of God is a great body; there are many thousands belonging to God's Israel. *Secondly*, We ought in our prayers to concern ourselves for this body. *Thirdly*, The welfare and happiness of the Israel of God consist in the continual presence of God among them. Their safety consists not in their numbers, though they are thousands, many thousands, but in the favour of God, and his gracious return to them and residence with them. These thousands are cyphers; he is the figure: and upon this account, *Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people!*

## Chapter 11

Hitherto things had gone pretty well in Israel; little interruption had been given to the methods of God's favour to them since the matter of the golden calf; the people seemed teachable in marshalling and purifying the camp, the princes devout and generous in dedicating the altar, and there was good hope that they would be in Canaan presently. But at this chapter begins a melancholy scene; the measures are all broken, God has turned to be their enemy, and fights against them—and it is sin that makes all this mischief. I. Their murmurings kindled a fire among them, which yet was soon quenched by the prayer of Moses (v. 1-3). II. No sooner was the fire of judgment quenched than the fire of sin breaks out again, and God takes occasion from it to magnify both his mercy and his justice. 1. The people fret for want of flesh (v. 4-9). 2. Moses frets for want of help (v. 10-15). Now, (1.) God promises to gratify them both, to appoint help for Moses (v. 16, 17), and to give the people flesh (v. 18-23). And, (2.) He presently makes good both these promises. For, [1.] The Spirit of God qualifies the seventy elders for the government (v. 24-30). [2.] The power of God brings quails to feast the people (v. 31, 32). Yet [3.] The justice of God plagued them for their murmurings (v. 33, etc.).

### Verses 1-3

Here is, I. The people's sin. They *complained*, v. 1. *They were, as it were, complainers*. So it is in the margin. There were some secret grudgings and discontents among them, which as yet did not break out in an open mutiny. But how great a matter did this little fire kindle! They had received from God excellent laws and ordinances, and yet no sooner had they departed from the mount of the Lord than they began to quarrel with God himself. See in this, 1. The sinfulness of sin, which takes occasion from the commandment to be the more provoking. 2. The weakness of the law through the flesh, Rom. 8:3. The law discovered sin, but could not destroy it; checked it, but could not conquer it. They *complained*. Interpreters enquire what they complained of; and truly, when they were furnished with so much matter for thanksgiving, one may justly wonder where they found any matter for complaint; it is probable that those who complained did not all agree in the cause. Some perhaps complained that they were removed from Mount Sinai, where they had been at rest so long, others that they did not remove sooner: some complained of the weather, others of the ways: some perhaps thought three days' journey was too long a march, others thought it not long enough, because it did not bring them into Canaan. When we consider how their camp was guided, guarded, graced, what good victuals they had and good company, and what care was taken of them in their marches that their feet should not swell nor their clothes wear (Deu. 8:4), we may ask, "What could have been done more for a people to make them easy?" And yet they complained. Note, Those that are of a fretful discontented spirit will always find something or other to quarrel with, though the circumstances of their outward condition be ever so favourable.

II. God's just resentment of the affront given to him by this sin: *The Lord heard it*, though it does not appear that Moses did. Note, God is acquainted with the secret frettings and murmurings of the heart, though they are industriously concealed from men. What he took notice of his was much displeased with, and his *anger was kindled*. Note, Though God graciously gives us leave to complain to him when there is cause (Ps. 142:2), yet he is justly provoked, and takes it very ill, if we complain of him

when there is no cause: such conduct in our inferiors provokes us.

III. The judgment wherewith God chastised them for this sin: *The fire of the Lord burnt among them*, such flashes of fire from the cloud as had consumed Nadab and Abihu. The fire of their wrath against God burned in their minds (Ps. 39:3), and justly does the fire of God's wrath fasten upon their bodies. We read of their murmurings several times, when they came first out of Egypt, Ex. 15, 16, and 17. But we do not read of any plagues inflicted on them for their murmurings, as there were now; for now they had had great experience of God's care of them, and therefore now to distrust him was so much the more inexcusable. Now a *fire was kindled against Jacob* (Ps. 78:21), but, to show how unwilling God was to contend with them, it fastened on those only that were *in the uttermost parts of the camp*. Thus God's judgments came upon them gradually, that they might take warning.

IV. Their cry to Moses, who was their tried intercessor, v. 2. *When he slew them, then they sought him*, and made their application to Moses to stand their friend. Note, 1. When we complain without cause, it is just with God to give us cause to complain. 2. Those that slight God's friends when they are in prosperity would be glad to make them their friends when they are in distress. *Father Abraham, send Lazarus*.

V. The prevalency of Moses's intercession for them: *When Moses prayed unto the Lord* (he was always ready to stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God) God had respect to him and his offering, and *the fire was quenched*. By this it appears that God delights not in punishing, for, when he has begun his controversy, he is soon prevailed with to let it fall. Moses was one of those worthies who *by faith quenched the violence of fire*.

VI. A new name given hereupon to the place, to perpetuate the shame of a murmuring people and the honour of a righteous God; the place was called *Taberah, a burning* (v. 3), that others might hear, and fear, and take warning not to sin as they did, lest they should smart as they did, 1 Co. 10:10.

### **Verses 4-15**

These verses represent things sadly unhinged and out of order in Israel, both the people and the prince uneasy.

I. Here is the people fretting, and speaking against God himself (as it is interpreted, Ps. 78:19), notwithstanding his glorious appearances both to them and for them. Observe,

1. Who were the criminals. (1.) The *mixed multitude* began, they *fell a lusting*, v. 4. The rabble that came with them out of Egypt, expecting only the land of promise, but not a state of probation in the way to it. They were hangers on, who took hold of the skirts of the Jews, and would go with them only because they knew not how to live at home, and were disposed to seek their fortunes (as we say) abroad. These were the scabbed sheep that infected the flock, the leaven that leavened the whole lump. Note, A few factious, discontented, ill-natured people, may do a great deal of mischief in the best societies, if great care be not taken to discountenance them. Such as these are an *untoward generation*, from which it is our wisdom to *save ourselves*, Acts 2:40. (2.) Even *the children of Israel* took the infection, as we are informed, v. 4. The holy seed joined themselves to the people of these abominations. The mixed multitude here spoken of were not numbered with the children of Israel, but were set aside as a people God made no account of; and yet the children of Israel, forgetting their own character and distinction, herded

themselves with them and learned their way, as if the scum and outcasts of the camp were to be the privy-counsellors of it. The children of Israel, a people near to God and highly privileged, yet drawn into rebellion against him! O how little honour has God in the world, when even the people which he formed for himself, to show forth his praise, were so much a dishonour to him! Therefore let none think that their external professions and privileges will be their security either against Satan's temptations to sin or God's judgments for sin. See 1 Co. 10:1, 2, 12.

2. What was the crime: they lusted and murmured. Though they had been lately corrected for this sin, and many of them overthrown for it, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the smell of the fire was still in their nostrils, yet they returned to it. See Prov. 27:22. (1.) They magnified the plenty and dainties they had had in Egypt (v. 5), as if God had done them a great deal of wrong in taking them thence. While they were in Egypt they sighed by reason of their burdens, for their lives were made bitter to them with hard bondage; and yet now they talk of Egypt as if they had all lived like princes there, when this serves as a colour for their present discontent. But with what face can they talk of eating fish in Egypt freely, or for nought, as if it cost them nothing, when they paid so dearly for it with their hard service? They *remember the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick* (precious stuff indeed to be fond of!), but they do not remember the brick-kilns and the task-masters, the voice of the oppressor and the smart of the whip. No, these are forgotten by these ungrateful people. (2.) They were sick of the good provision God had made for them, v. 6. It was bread from heaven, angels' food. To show how unreasonable their complaint was, it is here described, v. 7-9. It was good for food, and pleasant to the eye, every grain like an orient pearl; it was wholesome food and nourishing; it was not to be called *dry bread*, for it tasted like fresh oil; it was agreeable (the Jews say, Wisd. 16:20) to every man's palate, and tasted as he would have it; and, though it was still the same, yet, by the different ways of dressing it, it yielded them a grateful variety; it cost them no money, nor care, for it fell in the night, while they slept; and the labour of gathering it was not worth speaking of; they lived upon free quarter, and yet could talk of Egypt's cheapness and the fish they ate there freely. Nay, which was much more valuable than all this, the manna came from the immediate power and bounty of God, not from common providence, but from special favour. It was, as God's compassion, new every morning, always fresh, not as their food who live on shipboard. While they lived on manna, they seemed to be exempted from the curse which sin has brought on man, that in the *sweat of his face should he eat bread*. And yet they speak of manna with such scorn, as if it were not good enough to be meat for swine: *Our soul is dried away*. They speak as if God dealt hardly with them in allowing them no better food. At first they admired it (Ex. 16:15): *What is this?* "What a curious precious thing is this!" But now they despised it. Note, Peevish discontented minds will find fault with that which has no fault in it but that it is too good for them. It is very provoking to God to undervalue his favours, and to put a *but* upon our common mercies. Nothing but manna! Those that might be very happy often make themselves very miserable by their discontents. (3.) They could not be satisfied unless they had flesh to eat. They brought flocks and herds with them in great abundance out of Egypt; but either they were covetous, and could not find in their hearts to kill them, lest they should lessen their flocks (they must have flesh as cheap as they had bread, or they would not be pleased), or else they were curious, beef and mutton would not please them; they must have something more nice and delicate, like the fish they did eat in Egypt. Food

would not serve; they must be feasted. They had feasted with God upon the peace-offerings which they had their share of; but it seems God did not keep a table good enough for them, they must have daintier bits than any that came to his altar. Note, It is an evidence of the dominion of the carnal mind when we are solicitous to have all the delights and satisfactions of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable. *Be not desirous of dainties*, Prov. 23:1-3. If God gives us food convenient, we ought to be thankful, though we do not eat the fat and drink the sweet. (4.) They distrusted the power and goodness of God as insufficient for their supply: *Who will give us flesh to eat?* taking it for granted that God could not. Thus this question is commented upon, Ps. 78:19, 20, *Can he provide flesh also?* though he had given them flesh with their bread once, when he saw fit (Ex. 16:13), and they might have expected that he would do it again, and in mercy, if, instead of murmuring, they had prayed. Note, It is an offence to God to let our desires go beyond our faith. (5.) They were eager and importunate in their desires; they *lusted a lust*, so the word is, lusted greatly and greedily, till they wept again for vexation. So childish were the children of Israel, and so humoursome, that they cried because they had not what they would have and when they would have it. They did not offer up this desire to God, but would rather be beholden to any one else than to him. We should not indulge ourselves in any desire which we cannot in faith turn into prayer, as we cannot when we *ask meat for our lust*, Ps. 78:18. For this sin the *anger of the Lord was kindled greatly against them*, which is written for our admonition, that we should not *lust after evil things as they lusted*, 1 Co. 10:6. (6.) Flesh is good food, and may lawfully be eaten; yet they are said to lust after evil things. What is lawful of itself becomes evil to us when it is what God does not allot to us and yet we eagerly desire it.

II. Moses himself, though so meek and good a man, is uneasy upon this occasion: *Moses also was displeased*. Now, 1. It must be confessed that the provocation was very great. These murmurings of theirs reflected great dishonour upon God, and Moses laid to heart the reproaches cast on himself; they knew that he did his utmost for their good, and that he neither did nor could do any thing without a divine appointment; and yet to be thus continually teased and clamoured against by an unreasonable ungrateful people would break in upon the temper even of Moses himself. God considered this, and therefore we do not find that he chided him for his uneasiness. 2. Yet Moses expressed himself otherwise than became him upon this provocation, and came short of his duty both to God and Israel in these expostulations. (1.) He undervalues the honour God had put upon him, in making him the illustrious minister of his power and grace, in the deliverance and guidance of that peculiar people, which might have been sufficient to balance the burden. (2.) He complains too much of a sensible grievance, and lays too near his heart a little noise and fatigue. If he could not bear the toil of government, which was but running with the footman, how would he bear the terrors of war, which was contending with horses? He might easily have furnished himself with considerations enough to enable him to slight their clamours, and make nothing of them. (3.) He magnifies his own performances, that *all the burden of the people lay upon him*; whereas God himself did in effect ease him of all the burden. Moses needed not to be in care to provide quarters for them, or victuals; God did all. And, if any difficult case happened, he needed not to be in any perplexity, while he had the oracle to consult, and in it the divine wisdom to direct him, the divine authority to back him and bear him out, and almighty power itself to dispense rewards and punishments. (4.) He is not so sensible as he ought to be of the obligation he lay under, by virtue of the divine commission and command, to do the utmost he

could for his people, when he suggests that because they were not the children of his body therefore he was not concerned to take a fatherly care of them, though God himself, who might employ him as he pleased, had appointed him to be a father to them. (5.) He takes too much to himself when he asks, *Whence should I have flesh to give them* (v. 13), as if he were the housekeeper, and not God. *Moses gave them not the bread*, Jn. 6:32. Nor was it expected that he should give them the flesh, but as an instrument in God's hand; and if he meant, "Whence should God have it for them?" he too much limited the power of the Holy One of Israel. (6.) He speaks distrustfully of the divine grace when he despairs of being *able to bear all this people*, v. 14. 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. (7.) It was worst of all passionately to wish for death, and desire to be killed out of hand, because just at this time his life was made a little uneasy to him, v. 15. Is this Moses? Is this the meekest of all the men on the earth? The best have their infirmities, and fail sometimes in the exercise of that grace for which they are most eminent. But God graciously overlooked Moses's passion at this time, and therefore we must not be severe in our animadversions upon it, but pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation*.

### **Verses 16-23**

We have here God's gracious answer to both the foregoing complaints, wherein his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious.

I. Provision is made for the redress of the grievances Moses complains of. If he find the weight of government lie too heavy upon him, though he was a little too passionate in his remonstrance, yet he shall be eased, not by being discarded from the government himself, as he justly might have been if God had been extreme to mark what he said amiss, but by having assistants appointed him, who should be, as the apostle speaks (1 Co. 12:28), *helps, governments* (that is, helps in government), not at all to lessen or eclipse his honour, but to make the work more easy to him, and to *bear the burden of the people with him*. And that this provision might be both agreeable and really serviceable,

1. Moses is directed to nominate the persons, v. 16. The people were too hot and heady and tumultuous to be entrusted with the election; Moses must please himself in the choice, that he may not afterwards complain. The number he is to choose is seventy men, according to the number of the souls that went down into Egypt. He must choose such as he knew to be elders, that is, wise and experienced men. Those that had acquitted themselves best, as *rulers of thousands and hundreds* (Ex. 18:25), purchase to themselves now this good degree. "Choose such as thou knowest to be elders indeed, and not in name only, officers that execute their office." We read of the same number of elders (Ex. 24:1) that went up with Moses to Mount Sinai, but they were distinguished only for that occasion, these for a perpetuity; and, according to this constitution, the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, which in after ages sat at Jerusalem, and was the highest court of judgment among them, consisted of seventy men. Our Saviour seems to have had an eye to it in the choice of seventy disciples, who were to be assistants to the apostles, Lu. 10.

2. God promises to qualify them. If they were not found fit for the employ, they should be made fit, else they might prove more a hindrance than a help to Moses, v. 17. Though Moses had talked too boldly with God, yet God does not therefore break off

communion with him; he bears a great deal with us, and we must with one another: *I will come down* (said God) *and talk with thee*, when thou art more calm and composed; *and I will take of the same spirit* of wisdom, and piety, and courage, *that is upon thee*, and *put it upon them*. Not that Moses had the less of the Spirit for their sharing, nor that they were hereby made equal with him; Moses was still unequalled (Deu. 34:10), but they were clothed with a spirit of government proportionable to their place, and with a spirit of prophecy to prove their divine call to it, the government being a Theocracy. Note, (1.) Those whom God employs in any service he qualifies for it, and those that are not in some measure qualified cannot think themselves duly called. (2.) All good qualifications are from God; every *perfect gift is from the Father of lights*.

II. Even the humour of the discontented people shall be gratified too, that every mouth may be stopped. They are ordered to *sanctify themselves* (v. 18), that is, to put themselves into a posture to receive such a proof of God's power as should be a token both of mercy and judgment. *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*, Amos 4:12.

1. God promises (shall I say?)—he threatens rather, that they shall have their fill of flesh, that for a month together they shall not only be fed, but feasted, with flesh, besides their daily manna; and, if they have not a better government of their appetites than now it appears they have they shall be surfeited with it (v. 19, 20): You shall eat *till it come out at your nostrils, and become loathsome to you*. See here, (1.) The vanity of all the delights of sense; they will cloy, but not satisfy: spiritual pleasures are the contrary. As the world passes away, so do the lusts of it, 1 Jn. 2:17. What was greedily coveted in a little time comes to be nauseated. (2.) What brutish sins (and worse than brutish) gluttony and drunkenness are; they put a force upon nature, and make that the sickness of the body which should be its health; they are sins that are their own punishments, and yet not the worst that attend them. (3.) What a righteous thing it is with God to make that loathsome to men which they have inordinately lusted after. God could make them despise flesh as much as they had despised manna.

2. Moses objects the improbability of making good this word, v. 21, 22. It is an objection like that which the disciples made, Mk. 8:4, *Whence can a man satisfy these men?* Some excuse Moses here, and construe what he says as only a modest enquiry which way the supply must be expected; but it savours too much of diffidence and distrust of God to be justified. He objects the number of the people, as if he that provided bread for them all could not, by the same unlimited power, provide flesh too. He reckons it must be the flesh either of beasts or fishes, because they are the most bulky animals, little thinking that the flesh of birds, little birds, should serve the purpose. God sees not as man sees, but his thoughts are above ours. He objects the greediness of the people's desires in that word, *to suffice them*. Note, 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*. Moses himself could scarcely forbear saying, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* when this had become the common cry. No doubt this was his infirmity.

3. God gives a short but sufficient answer to the objection in that question, *Has the Lord's hand waxed short?* v. 23. If Moses had remembered *the years of the right hand of the Most High*, he would not have started all these difficulties; therefore God reminds him of them, intimating that this objection reflected upon the divine power, of which he himself had been so often, not only the witness, but the instrument. Had he forgotten what wonders the divine power had wrought for that people, when it

inflicted the plagues of Egypt, divided the sea, broached the rock, and rained bread from heaven? Had that power abated? Was God weaker than he used to be? Or was he tired with what he had done? Whatever our unbelieving hearts may suggest to the contrary, it is certain, (1.) That God's hand is not short; his power cannot be restrained in the exerting of itself by any thing but his own will; with him nothing is impossible. That hand is not short which measures the waters, metes out the heavens (Isa. 40:12), and grasps the winds, Prov. 30:4. (2.) That it has not waxed short. He is as strong as ever he was, *fainteth not, neither is weary*. And this is sufficient to silence all our distrusts when means fail us, *Is any thing too hard for the Lord?* God here brings Moses to this first principle, sets him back in his lesson, to learn the ancient name of God, *The Lord God Almighty*, and puts the proof upon the issue: *Thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass or not*. This magnifies God's word above all his name, that his works never come short of it. If he speaks, it is done.

### **Verses 24-30**

We have here the performance of God's word to Moses, that he should have help in the government of Israel.

I. Here is the case of the seventy privy-counsellors in general. Moses, though a little disturbed by the tumult of the people, yet was thoroughly composed by the communion he had with God, and soon came to himself again. And according as the matter was concerted, 1. He did his part; he presented the seventy elders before the Lord, round the tabernacle (v. 24), that they might there stand ready to receive the grace of God, in the place where he manifested himself, and that the people also might be witnesses of their solemn call. Note, Those that expect favour from God must humbly offer themselves and their service to him. 2. God was not wanting to do his part. *He gave of his Spirit to the seventy elders* (v. 25), which enabled those whose capacities and education set them but on a level with their neighbours of a sudden to say and do that which was extraordinary, and which proved them to be actuated by divine inspiration: they prophesied, and did not cease all that day, and (some think) only that day. They discoursed to the people of the things of God, and perhaps commented upon the law they had lately received with admirable clearness, and fulness, and readiness, and aptness of expression, so that all who heard them might see and say that *God was with them of a truth*; see 1 Co. 14:24, 25. Thus, long afterwards, Saul was marked for the government by the gift of prophecy, which came upon him for a day and a night, 1 Sa. 10:6, 11. When Moses was to fetch Israel out of Egypt, Aaron was appointed to be his prophet, Ex. 7:1. But, now that God had called Aaron to other work, in his room Moses has seventy prophets to attend him. Note, Those are fittest to rule in God's Israel that are well acquainted with divine things and are apt to teach to edification.

II. Here is the particular case of two of them, *Eldad* and *Medad*, probably two brothers.

1. They were nominated by Moses to be assistants in the government, but they *went not out unto the tabernacle* as the rest did, v. 26. Calvin conjectures that the summons was sent them, but that it did not find them, they being somewhere out of the way; so that, though they were written, yet they were not called. Most think that they declined coming to the tabernacle out of an excess of modesty and humility; being sensible of their own weakness and unworthiness, they desired to be excused from coming into the government. Their principle was their praise, but their practice in not obeying orders was their fault.

2. The Spirit of God found them out in the camp, where they were hidden among the stuff, and there they prophesied, that is,

they exercised their gift of praying, preaching, and praising God, in some private tent. Note, The Spirit of God is not tied to the tabernacle, but, *like the wind, blows where he listeth*, Jn. 3:8. *Whither can we go from that Spirit?* There was a special providence in it that these two should be absent, for thus it appeared that it was indeed a divine Spirit which the elders were actuated by, and that Moses gave them not that Spirit, but God himself. They modestly declined preferment, but God forced it upon them; nay, they have the honour of being *named*, which the rest have not: for those that humble themselves shall be exalted, and those are most fit for government who are least ambitious of it.

3. Information of this was given to Moses (v. 27): "*Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp*; there is a conventicle in such a tent, and Eldad and Medad are holding forth there, from under the inspection and presidency of Moses, and out of the communion of the rest of the elders." Whoever the person was that brought the tidings, he seems to have looked upon it as an irregularity.

4. Joshua moved to have them silenced: *My lord Moses, forbid them*, v. 28. It is probable that Joshua himself was one of the seventy, which made him the more jealous for the honour of their order. He takes it for granted that they were not under any necessitating impulse, *for the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets*, and therefore he would have them either not to prophesy at all or to come to the tabernacle and prophesy in concert with the rest. He does not desire that they should be punished for what they had done, but only restrained for the future. This motion he made from a good principle, not out of any personal dislike to Eldad and Medad, but out of an honest zeal for that which he apprehended to be the unity of the church, and concern for the honour of God and Moses.

5. Moses rejected the motion, and reprov'd him that made it (v. 29): "*Enviest thou for my sake? Thou knowest not what manner of spirit thou art of.*" Though Joshua was Moses's particular friend and confidant, though he said this out of a respect to Moses, whose honour he was very loth to see lessened by the call of those elders, yet Moses reprov'd him, and in him all that show such a spirit. (1.) We must not secretly grieve at the gifts, graces, and usefulness of others. It was the fault of John's disciples that they envied Christ's honour because it shaded their master's, Jn. 3:26, etc. (2.) We must not be transported into heats against the weaknesses and infirmities of others. Granting that Eldad and Medad were guilty of an irregularity, yet Joshua was too quick and too warm upon them. Our zeal must always be tempered with the meekness of wisdom: the righteousness of God needs not the wrath of man, Jam. 1:20. (3.) We must not make even the best and most useful men heads of a party. Paul would not have his name made use of to patronise a faction, 1 Co. 1:12, 13. (4.) We must not be forward to condemn and silence those that differ from us, as if they did not follow Christ because they do not follow *him with us*, Mk. 9:38. 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 was of another spirit; so far from silencing these two, and quenching the Spirit in them, he wished *all the Lord's people were prophets*, that is, that he would *put his Spirit upon them*. Not that he would have any set up for prophets that were not duly qualified, or that he expected that the Spirit of prophecy should be made thus common; but thus he expresses the love and esteem he had for *all the Lord's people*, the complacency he took in the gifts of others, and how far he was from being displeas'd at Eldad and Medad's prophesying from under his eye. Such an excellent spirit as this blessed Paul was of, rejoicing

that Christ was preached, though it was by those who therein intended to *add affliction to his bonds*, Phil. 1:16. We ought to be pleased that God is served and glorified, and good done, though to the lessening of our credit and the credit of our way.

6. The elders, now newly ordained, immediately entered upon their administration (v. 30); when their call was sufficiently attested by their prophesying, they went with Moses to the camp, and applied themselves to business. Having received the gift, they *ministered the same as good stewards*. And now Moses was pleased that he had so many to share with him in his work and honour. And, (1.) Let the testimony of Moses be credited 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, when they fall under the doom of the unprofitable servant that buried his talent. (2.) Let the example of Moses be imitated by those that are in power; let them not despise the advice and assistance of others, but desire it, and be thankful for it, not coveting to monopolize wisdom and power. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

### **Verses 31-35**

God, having performed his promise to Moses by giving him assessors in the government, thereby proving the power he has over the spirits of men by his Spirit, he here performs his promise to the people by giving them flesh, proving thereby his power over the inferior creatures and his dominion in the kingdom of nature. Observe, 1. How the people were gratified with flesh in abundance: *A wind* (a south-east wind, as appears, Ps. 78:26) *brought quails*, v. 31. It is uncertain what sort of animals they were; the psalmist calls them *feathered fowl*, or *fowl of wing*. The learned bishop Patrick inclines to agree with some modern writers, who think they were *locusts*, a delicious sort of food well known in those parts, the rather because they were brought with a wind, lay in heaps, and were dried in the sun for use. Whatever they were, they answered the intention, they served for a month's feast for Israel, such an indulgent Father was God to his froward family. Locusts, that had been a plague to fruitful Egypt, feeding upon the fruits, were a blessing to a barren wilderness, being themselves fed upon. 2. How greedy they were of this flesh that God sent them. They *flew upon the spoil* with an insatiable appetite, not regarding what Moses had told them from God, that they would surfeit upon it, 5:32. Two days and a night they were at it, gathering flesh, till every master of a family had brought home ten homers (that is, ten ass-loads) at least. David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem, but would not drink it when he had it, because it was obtained by venturing; much more reason these Israelites had to refuse this flesh, which was obtained by murmuring, and which, they might easily perceive, by what Moses said, was given them in anger; but those that 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. 3. How dearly they paid for their feasts, when it came into the reckoning: *The Lord smote them with a very great plague* (v. 33), some bodily disease, which probably was the effect of their surfeit, and was the death of many of them, and those, it is likely, the ringleaders in the mutiny. Note, God often grants the desires of his own people in love. He *gave them their request*, but *sent leanness into their soul*, Ps. 16:15. By all that was said to them they *were not estranged from their lusts*, and therefore, *while the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them*, Ps. 78:30, 31. What we inordinately desire, if we obtain it (we have reason to fear), will be some way or other a grief and cross to us. God satiated them first, and then plagued them, (1.) To save the reputation of his own power, that it might not be said, "He would

not have cut them off had he been able to supply them." And, (2.) To show us the meaning of the prosperity of sinners; it is their preparation for ruin, they are fed as an ox for the slaughter. *Lastly*, The remembrance of this is preserved in the name given to the place, v. 34. Moses called it *Kibroth-hattaavah*, the *graves of lusters* or *of lust*. And well it had been if these graves of Israel's lusters had proved the graves of Israel's lust: the warning was designed to be so, but it had not its due effect, for it follows (Ps. 78:32), *For all this, they sinned still*.

## Chapter 12

In the foregoing chapter we had the vexation which the people gave to Moses; in this we have his patience tried by his own relations. I. Miriam and Aaron, his own brother and sister, affronted him (v. 1-3). II. God called them to an account for it (v. 4-9). III. Miriam was smitten with a leprosy for it (v. 10). IV. Aaron submits, and Moses meekly intercedes for Miriam (v. 11-13). V. She is healed, but put to shame for seven days (v. 14-16). And this is recorded to show that the best persons and families have both their follies and their crosses.

### Verses 1-3

Here is, I. The unbecoming passion of Aaron and Miriam: they *spoke against Moses*, v. 1. If Moses, that received so much honour from God, yet received so many slights and affronts from men, shall any of us think such trials either strange or hard, and be either provoked or discouraged by them? But who would have thought that disturbance should be created to Moses, 1. From those that were themselves serious and good; nay, that were eminent in religion, Miriam a prophetess, Aaron the high priest, both of them joint-commissioners with Moses for the deliverance of Israel? Mic. 6:4, *I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam*. 2. From those that were his nearest relations, his own brother and sister, who shone so much by rays borrowed from him? Thus the spouse complains (Cant. 1:6), *My mother's children were angry with me*; and quarrels among relations are in a special manner grievous. *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city*. Yet this helps to confirm the call of Moses, and shows that his advancement was purely by the divine favour, and not by any compact or collusion with his kindred, who themselves grudged his advancement. Neither did many of our Saviour's kindred believe on him, Jn. 7:5. It should seem that Miriam began the quarrel, and Aaron, not having been employed or consulted in the choice of the seventy elders, was for the present somewhat disgusted, and so was the sooner drawn in to take his sister's part. It would grieve one to see the hand of Aaron in so many trespasses, but it shows that *the law made men priests who had infirmity*. Satan prevailed first with Eve, and by her with Adam; see what need we have to take heed of being drawn into quarrels by our relations, for we know not how great a matter a little fire may kindle. Aaron ought to have remembered how Moses stood his friend when God was angry with him for making the golden calf (Deu. 9:20), and not to have rendered him evil for good. Two things they quarrelled with Moses about:—(1.) About his marriage: some think a late marriage with a Cushite or Arabian; others because of Zipporah, whom on this occasion they called, in scorn, an Ethiopian woman, and who, they insinuated, had too great an influence upon Moses in the choice of these seventy elders. Perhaps there was some private falling out between Zipporah and Miriam, which occasioned some hot words, and one peevish reflection introduced another, till Moses and Aaron came to be interested. (2.) About his government; not the mismanagement of it, but the monopolizing of it (v. 2): *"Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses? Must he alone have the choice of the persons on whom the spirit of prophecy shall come? Hath he not spoken also by us? Might not we have had a hand in that affair, and preferred our friends, as well as Moses his?"* They could not deny that God had spoken by Moses, but it was plain he had sometimes spoken also by them; and that which they intended was to make themselves equal with him, though God had so many ways distinguished him. Note, Striving to be greatest is a sin which easily

besets disciples themselves, and it is exceedingly sinful. Even those that are well preferred are seldom pleased if others be better preferred. Those that excel are commonly envied.

II. The wonderful patience of Moses under this provocation. *The Lord heard it* (v. 2), but Moses himself took no notice of it, for (v. 3) he was very meek. He had a great deal of reason to resent the affront; it was ill-natured and ill-timed, when the people were disposed to mutiny, and had lately given him a great deal of vexation with their murmurings, which would be in danger of breaking out again when thus headed and countenanced by Aaron and Miriam; but he, *as a deaf man, heard not*. When God's honour was concerned, as in the case of the golden calf, no man more zealous than Moses; but, when his own honour was touched, no man more meek: as bold as a lion in the cause of God, but as mild as a lamb in his own cause. God's people are the *meek of the earth* (Zep. 2:3), but some are more remarkable than others for this grace, as Moses, who was thus fitted for the work he was called to, which required all the meekness he had and sometimes more. And sometimes the unkindness of our friends is a greater trial of our meekness than the malice of our enemies. Christ himself records his own meekness (Mt. 11:29, *I am meek and lowly in heart*), and the copy of meekness which Christ has set was without a blot, but that of Moses was not.

#### **Verses 4-9**

Moses did not resent the injury done him, nor complain of it to God, nor make any appeal to him; but God resented it. He hears all we say in our passion, and is a swift witness of our hasty speeches, which is a reason why we should resolutely bridle our tongues, that we speak not ill of others, and why we should patiently stop our ears, and not take notice of it, if others speak ill of us. *I heard not, for thou wilt hear*, Ps. 38:13-15. The more silent we are in our own cause the more is God engaged to plead it. The accused innocent needs to say little if he knows the judge himself will be his advocate.

I. The cause is called, and the parties are summoned forthwith to attend at the door of the tabernacle, v. 4, 5. Moses had often shown himself jealous for God's honour, and now God showed himself jealous for his reputation; for *those that honour God he will honour*, nor will he ever be behind-hand with any that appear for him. Judges of old sat in the gate of the city to try causes, and so on this occasion the *shechinah* in the cloud of glory stood *at the door of the tabernacle*, and Aaron and Miriam, as delinquents, were called to the bar.

II. Aaron and Miriam were made to know that great as they were they must not pretend to be equal to Moses, nor set up as rivals with him, v. 6-8. Were they prophets of the Lord? Of Moses it might be truly said, *He more*. 1. It was true that God put a great deal of honour upon the prophets. However men mocked them and misused them, they were the favourites and intimates of heaven. God *made himself known to them*, either by dreams when they were asleep or by visions when they were awake, and by them made himself known to others. And those are happy, those are great, truly great, truly happy, to whom God *makes himself known*. Now he does it not by dreams and visions, as of old, but by the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation*, who makes known those things to babes which *prophets and kings* desired to see and might not. Hence in the last days, the days of the Messiah, the *sons and daughters* are said to *prophesy* (Joel 2:28), because they shall be better acquainted with the mysteries of the kingdom of grace than even the prophets themselves were; see Heb. 1:1, 2. 2. Yet the honour put upon Moses was far

greater (v. 7): *My servant Moses is not so*, he excels them all. To recompense Moses for his meekly and patiently bearing the affronts which Miriam and Aaron gave him, God not only cleared him, but praised him; and took that occasion to give him an encomium which remains upon record to his immortal honour; and thus shall those that are reviled and persecuted for righteousness' sake have a *great reward in heaven*, Christ will confess them before his Father and the holy angels. (1.) Moses was a man of great integrity and tried fidelity. He is *faithful in all my house*. This is put first in his character, because grace excels gifts, love excels knowledge, and sincerity in the service of God puts a greater honour upon a man and recommends him to the divine favour more than learning, abstruse speculations, and an ability to *speak with tongues*. This is that part of Moses's character which the apostle quotes when he would show that Christ was greater than Moses, making it out that he was so in this chief instance of his greatness; for Moses was faithful only *as a servant*, but Christ *as a son*, Heb. 3:2, 5, 6. God entrusted Moses to deliver his mind in all things to Israel; Israel entrusted him to treat for them with God; and he was faithful to both. He said and did every thing in the management of that great affair as became an honest good man, that aimed at nothing else but the honour of God and the welfare of Israel. (2.) Moses was therefore honoured with clearer discoveries of God's mind, and a more intimate communion with God, than any other prophet whatsoever. He shall, [1.] Hear more from God than any other prophet, more clearly and distinctly: *With him will I speak mouth to mouth, or face to face* (Ex. 30:11), *as a man speaks to his friend*, whom he discourses with freely and familiarly, and without any confusion or consternation, such as sometimes other prophets were under; as Ezekiel, and John himself, when God spoke to them. By other prophets God sent to his people reproofs, and predictions of good or evil, which were properly enough delivered in dark speeches, figures, types, and parables; but by Moses he gave laws to his people, and the institution of holy ordinances, which could by no means be delivered by dark speeches, but must be expressed in the plainest and most intelligible manner. [2.] He shall see more of God than any other prophet: *The similitude of the Lord shall behold*, as he hath seen it in Horeb, when God proclaimed his name before him. Yet he saw only the similitude of the Lord, angels and glorified saints always behold the face of our Father. Moses had the spirit of prophecy in a way peculiar to himself, and which set him far above all other prophets; yet *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*, much more does our Lord Jesus infinitely excel him, Heb. 3:1, etc.

Now let Miriam and Aaron consider who it was that they insulted: *Were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Against my servant, against Moses?* so it runs in the original. "How dare you abuse any servant of mine, especially such a servant as Moses, who is a friend, a confidant, and steward of the house?" How durst they speak to the grief and reproach of one whom God had so much to say in commendation of? Might they not expect that God would resent it, and take it as an affront to himself? Note, We have reason to be afraid of saying or doing any thing against the servants of God; it is at our peril if we do, for God will plead their cause, and reckon that what *touches them touches the apple of his eye*. It is a dangerous thing to *offend Christ's little ones*, Mt. 18:6. Those are presumptuous indeed that *are not afraid to speak evil of dignities*, 2 Pt. 2:10. III. God, having thus shown them their fault and folly, next shows them his displeasure (v. 9): *The anger of the Lord was kindled against them*, of which perhaps some sensible indications were given in the change of the colour of the cloud, or some flashes of lightning from it. But indeed it was indication enough of his displeasure that he departed, and would not so much as

hear their excuse, for he needed not, *understanding their thoughts afar off*; and thus he would show that he was displeased. Note, The removal of God's presence from us is the surest and saddest token of God's displeasure against us. Woe unto us if he depart; and he never departs till we by our sin and folly drive him from us.

### **Verses 10-16**

Here is, I. God's judgment upon Miriam (v. 10): *The cloud departed from off* that part of *the tabernacle*, in token of God's displeasure, and presently Miriam became leprous; when God goes, evil comes; expect no good when God departs. The leprosy was a disease often inflicted by the immediate hand of God as the punishment of some particular sin, as on Gehazi for lying, on Uzziah for invading the priest's office, and here on Miriam for scolding and making mischief among relations. The plague of the leprosy, it is likely, appeared in her face, so that it appeared to all that saw her that she was struck with it, with the worst of it, she was leprous as snow; not only so white, but so soft, the solid flesh losing its consistency, as that which putrefies does. Her foul tongue (says bishop Hall) is justly punished with a foul face, and her folly in pretending to be a rival with Moses is made manifest to all men, for every one sees his face to be glorious, and hers to be leprous. While Moses needs a veil to hide his glory, Miriam needs one to hide her shame. Note, Those distempers which any way deform us ought to be construed as a rebuke to our pride, and improved for the cure of it, and under such humbling providences we ought to be very humble. It is a sign that the heart is hard indeed if the flesh be mortified, and yet the lusts of the flesh remain unmortified. It should seem that this plague upon Miriam was designed for an exposition of the law concerning the leprosy (Lev. 13), for it is referred to upon the rehearsal of that law, Deu. 24:8, 9. Miriam was struck with a leprosy, but not Aaron, because she was first in the transgression, and God would put a difference between those that mislead and those that are misled. Aaron's office, though it saved him not from God's displeasure, yet helped to secure him from this token of his displeasure, which would not only have suspended him for the present from officiating, when (there being no priests but himself and his two sons) he could ill be spared, but it would have rendered him and his office mean, and would have been a lasting blot upon his family. Aaron as priest was to be the judge of the leprosy, and his performing that part of his office upon this occasion, when he *looked upon Miriam, and behold she was leprous*, was a sufficient mortification to him. He was struck through her side, and could not pronounce her leprous without blushing and trembling, knowing himself to be equally obnoxious. This judgment upon Miriam is improvable by us as a warning to take heed of putting any affront upon our Lord Jesus. If she was thus chastised for speaking against Moses, what will become of those that sin against Christ?

II. Aaron's submission hereupon (v. 11, 12); he humbles himself to Moses, confesses his fault, and begs pardon. He that but just now joined with his sister in speaking against Moses is here forced for himself and his sister to make a penitent address to him, and in the highest degree to magnify him (as if he had the power of God to forgive and heal) whom he had so lately vilified. Note, Those that trample upon the saints and servants of God will one day be glad to make court to them; at furthest, in the other world, as the foolish virgins to the wise for a little oil, and the rich man to Lazarus for a little water; and perhaps in this world, as Job's friend to him for his prayers, and here Aaron to Moses. Rev. 3:9. In his submission, 1. He confesses his own and his sister's sin, v. 11. He speaks respectfully to Moses, of whom he had spoken slightly, calls him his lord, and now

turns the reproach upon himself, speaks as one ashamed of what he had said: *We have sinned, we have done foolishly*. Those sin, and do foolishly, who revile and speak evil of any, especially of good people or of those in authority. Repentance is the unsaying of that which we have said amiss, and it had better be unsaid than that we be undone by it. 2. He begs Moses's pardon: *Lay not this sin upon us*. Aaron was to bring his gift to the altar, but, knowing that his brother had something against him, he of all men was concerned to reconcile himself to his brother, that he might be qualified to offer his gift. Some think that this speedy submission which God saw him ready to make was that which prevented his being struck with a leprosy as his sister was. 3. He recommends the deplorable condition of his sister to Moses's compassionate consideration (v. 12): *Let her not be as one dead*, that is, "Let her not continue so separated from conversation, defiling all she touches, and even to putrefy above ground as one dead." He eloquently describes the misery of her case, to move his pity.

III. The intercession made for Miriam (v. 13): He *cried unto the Lord* with a loud voice, because the cloud, the symbol of his presence, was removed and stood at some distance, and to express his fervency in this request, *Heal her now, O Lord, I beseech thee*. By this he made it to appear that he did heartily forgive her the injury she had done him, that he had not accused her to God, nor called for justice against her; so far from this that, when God in tenderness to his honour had chastised her insolence, he was the first that moved for reversing the judgment. By this example we are taught to *pray for those that despitefully use us*; and not to take pleasure in the most righteous punishment inflicted either by God or man on those that have been injurious to us. Jeroboam's withered hand was restored at the special instance and request of the prophet against whom it had been stretched out, 1 Ki. 13:6. So Miriam here was healed by the prayer of Moses, whom she had abused, and Abimelech by the prayer of Abraham, Gen. 20:17. Moses might have stood off, and have said, "She is served well enough, let her govern her tongue better next time;" but, not content with being able to say that he had not prayed for the inflicting of the judgment, he prays earnestly for the removal of it. This pattern of Moses, and that of our Saviour, *Father, forgive them*, we must study to conform to.

IV. The accommodating of this matter so as that mercy and justice might meet together. 1. Mercy takes place so far as that Miriam shall be healed; Moses forgives her, and God will. See 2 Co. 2:10. But, 2. Justice takes place so far as that Miriam shall be humbled (v. 14): *Let her be shut out from the camp seven days*, that she herself might be made more sensible of her fault and penitent for it, and that her punishment might be the more public, and all Israel might take notice of it and take warning by it not to mutiny. If Miriam the prophetess be put under such marks of humiliation for one hasty word spoken against Moses, what may we expect for our murmurings? *If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* See how people debase and diminish themselves by sin, stain their glory, and lay their honour in the dust. When Miriam praised God, we find her at the head of the congregation and one of the brightest ornaments of it, Ex. 15:20. Now that she quarrelled with God we find her expelled as the filth and off-scouring of it. A reason is given for her being put out of the camp for seven days, because thus she ought to *accept of the punishment of her iniquity*. If her father, her earthly father, had but spit in her face, and so signified his displeasure against her, would she not be so troubled and concerned at it, and so sorry that she had deserved it, as to shut herself up for some time in her room, and not come into his presence, or show her face in the family,

being ashamed of her own folly and unhappiness? If such reverence as this be owing to the fathers of our flesh, when they correct us, much more ought we to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the Father of spirits, Heb. 12:9. Note, When we are under the tokens of God's displeasure for sin, it becomes us to take shame to ourselves, and to lie down in that shame, owning that *to us belongs confusion of face*. If by our own fault and folly we expose ourselves to the reproach and contempt of men, the just censures of the church, or the rebukes of the divine Providence, we must confess that our Father justly spits in our face, and be ashamed.

V. The hindrance that this gave to the people's progress: *The people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again*, v. 15. God did not remove the cloud, and therefore they did not remove their camp. This was intended, 1. As a rebuke to the people, who were conscious to themselves of having sinned after the similitude of Miriam's transgression, in speaking against Moses: thus far therefore they shall share in her punishment, that it shall retard their march forward towards Canaan. Many things oppose us, but nothing hinders us in the way to heaven as sin does. 2. As a mark of respect to Miriam. If the camp had removed during the days of her suspension, her trouble and shame had been the greater; therefore, in compassion to her, they shall stay till her excommunication be taken off, and she taken in again, it is probable with the usual ceremonies of the cleansing of lepers. Note, Those that are under censure and rebuke for sin ought to be treated with a great deal of tenderness, and not be over-loaded, no, not with the shame they have deserved, not *counted as enemies* (2 Th. 3:15), but *forgiven and comforted*, 2 Co. 2:7. Sinners must be cast out with grief, and penitents taken in with joy. When Miriam was absolved and re-admitted, the people went forward into the wilderness of Paran, which joined up to the south border of Canaan, and thither their next remove would have been if they had not put a bar in their own way.

## Chapter 13

It is a memorable and very melancholy story which is related in this and the following chapter, of the turning back of Israel from the borders of Canaan, when they were just ready to set foot in it, and the sentencing of them to wander and perish in the wilderness for their unbelief and murmuring. It is referred to Ps. 95:7, etc., and improved for warning to Christians, Heb. 3:7, etc. In this chapter we have, I. The sending of twelve spies before them into Canaan (v. 1–16). II. The instructions given to these spies (v. 17–20). III. Their executing their commission according to their instructions, and their return from the search (v. 21–25). IV. The report they brought back to the camp of Israel (v. 26, etc.).

### Verses 1-20

Here we have, I. Orders given to send spies to search out the land of Canaan. It is here said, God directed Moses to send them (v. 1, 2), but it appears by the repetition of the story afterwards (Deu. 1:22) that the motion came originally from the people; they came to Moses, and said, *We will send men before us*; and it was the fruit of their unbelief. They would not take God's word that it was a good land, and that he would, without fail, put them in possession of it. They could not trust the pillar of cloud and fire to show them the way to it, but had a better opinion of their own politics than of God's wisdom. How absurd was it for them to send to spy out a land which God himself had spied out for them, to enquire the way into it when God himself had undertaken to show them the way! But thus we ruin ourselves by giving more credit to the reports and representations of sense than to divine revelation; we walk by sight, not by faith; whereas, *if we will receive the witness of men*, without doubt *the witness of God is greater*. The people making this motion to Moses, he (perhaps not aware of the unbelief at the bottom of it) consulted God in the case, who bade him gratify the people in this matter, and send spies before them: "Let them walk in their own counsels." Yet God was no way accessory to the sin that followed, for the sending of these spies was so far from being the cause of the sin that if the spies had done their duty, and the people theirs, it might have been the confirmation of their faith, and of good service to them.

II. The persons nominated that were to be employed in this service (v. 4, etc.), one of each tribe, that it might appear to be the act of the people in general; and rulers, person of figure in their respective tribes, some of the rulers of thousands or hundreds, to put the greater credit upon their embassy. This was designed for the best, but it proved to have this ill effect that the quality of the persons occasioned the evil report they brought up to be the more credited and the people to be the more influenced by it. Some think that they are all named for the sake of two good ones that were among them, Caleb and Joshua. Notice is taken of the change of Joshua's name upon this occasion, v. 16. He was Moses's minister, but had been employed, though of the tribe of Ephraim, as general of the forces that were sent out against Amalek. The name by which he was generally called and known in his own tribe was *Oshea*, but Moses called him *Joshua*, in token of his affection to him and power over him; and now, it should seem, he ordered others to call him so, and fixed that to be his name henceforward. *Oshea* signifies a prayer for salvation, *Save thou*; *Joshua* signifies a promise of salvation, *He will save*, in answer to that prayer: so near is the relation between prayers and promises. Prayers prevail for promises, and promises direct and encourage prayers. Some think that

Moses designed, by taking the first syllable of the name Jehovah and prefixing it to his name, which turned *Hoshea* into *Jehoshua*, to put an honour upon him, and to encourage him in this and all his future services with the assurances of God's presence. Yet after this he is called *Hoshea*, Deu. 32:44. *Jesus* is the same name with *Joshua*, and it is the name of our Lord Christ, of whom Joshua was a type as successor to Moses, Israel's captain, and conqueror of Canaan. There was another of the same name, who was also a type of Christ, Zec. 6:11. Joshua was the saviour of God's people from the powers of Canaan, but Christ is their Saviour from the powers of hell.

III. The instructions given to those spies. They were sent into the land of Canaan the nearest way, to traverse the country, and to take account of its present state, v. 17. Two heads of enquiry were given them in charge, 1. Concerning the land itself: *See what that is* (v. 18, and again, v. 19), see whether it be *good or bad*, and (v. 20) *whether it be fat or lean*. All parts of the earth do not share alike in the blessing of fruitfulness; some countries are blessed with a richer soil than others. Moses himself was well satisfied that Canaan was a very good land, but he sent these spies to bring an account of it for the satisfaction of the people; as John Baptist sent to Jesus, to ask whether he was the Christ, not to inform himself, but to inform those he sent. They must take notice whether the air was healthful or no, what the soil was, and what the productions; and, for the better satisfaction of the people, they must bring with them some of the fruits. 2. Concerning the inhabitants—their number, few or many—their size and stature, whether strong able-bodied men or weak,—their habitations, whether they lived in tents or houses, whether in open villages or in walled towns,—whether the woods were standing as in those countries that are uncultivated, through the unskillfulness and slothfulness of the inhabitants, or whether the woods were cut down, and the country made champaign, for the convenience of tillage. These were the things they were to enquire about. Perhaps there had not been of late years such commerce between Egypt and Canaan as there was in Jacob's time, else they might have informed themselves of these things without sending men on purpose to search. See the advantage we may derive from books and learning, which acquaint those that are curious and inquisitive with the state of foreign countries, at a much greater distance than Canaan was now from Israel, without this trouble and expense.

IV. Moses dismisses the spies with this charge, *Be of good courage*, intimating, not only that they should be themselves encouraged against the difficulties of this expedition, but that they should bring an encouraging account to the people and make the best of every thing. It was not only a great undertaking they were put upon, which required good management and resolution, but it was a great trust that was reposed in them, which required that they should be faithful.

#### **Verses 21-25**

We have here a short account of the survey which the spies made of the promised land. 1. They went quite through it, from Zin in the south, to Rehob, near Hamath, in the north, v. 21. See ch. 34:3, 8. It is probable that they did not go altogether in a body, lest they should be suspected and taken up, which there would be the more danger of if the Canaanites knew (and one would think they could not but know) how near the Israelites were to them; but they divided themselves into several companies, and so passed unsuspected, as way-faring men. 2. They took particular notice of Hebron (v. 22), probably because near there was the field of Machpelah, where the patriarchs were buried (Gen. 23:2), whose dead bodies did, as it were, keep possession of

that land for their posterity. To this sepulchre they made a particular visit, and found the adjoining city in the possession of the sons of Anak, who are here named. In that place where they expected the greatest encouragements they met with the greatest discouragements. Where the bodies of their ancestors kept possession for them the giants kept possession against them. *They ascended by the south, and came to Hebron*, that is, "Caleb," say the Jews, "in particular," for to his being there we find express reference, Jos. 14:9, 12, 13. But that others of the spies were there too appears by their description of the Anakim, v. 33. 3. They brought a bunch of grapes with them, and some other of the fruits of the land, as a proof of the extraordinary goodness of the country. Probably they furnished themselves with these fruits when they were leaving the country and returning. The cluster of grapes was so large and so heavy that they hung it upon a bar, and carried it between two of them, v. 23, 24. The place whence they took it was, from this circumstance, called the *valley of the cluster*, that famous cluster which was to Israel both the earnest and the specimen of all the fruits of Canaan. Such are the present comforts which we have in communion with God, foretastes of the fulness of joy we expect in the heavenly Canaan. We may see by them what heaven is.

### **Verses 26-33**

It is a wonder how the people of Israel had patience to stay forty days for the return of their spies, when they were just ready to enter Canaan, under all the assurances of success they could have from the divine power, and a constant series of miracles that had hitherto attended them; but they distrusted God's power and promise, and were willing to be held in suspense by their own counsels, rather than be brought to a certainty by God's covenant. How much do we stand in our own light by our unbelief! Well, at length the messengers return, but they agree not in their report.

I. The major part discourage the people from going forward to Canaan; and justly are the Israelites left to this temptation, for putting so much confidence in the judgment of men, when they had the word of God to trust to. It is a righteous thing with God to give those up to strong delusions who will not receive his truth in the love of it.

1. Observe their report. (1.) They could not deny but that the land of Canaan was a very fruitful land; the bunch of grapes they brought with them was an ocular demonstration of it, v. 27. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, and the evil spies themselves own that it is such a land. Thus even out of the mouth of adversaries will God be glorified and the truth of his promise attested. And yet afterwards they contradict themselves, when they say (v. 32), *It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof*; as if, though it had milk, and honey, and grapes, yet it wanted other necessary provision; some think that there was a great plague in the country at the time they surveyed it, which they ought to have imputed to the wisdom of the divine Providence, which thus lessened the numbers of their enemies, to facilitate their conquests; but they invidiously imputed it to the unwholesomeness of the air, and thence took occasion to disparage the country. For this unreasonable fear of a plague in Canaan, they were justly cut off immediately by a *plague in the wilderness*, ch. 14:37. But, (2.) They represented the conquest of it as altogether impracticable, and that it was to no purpose to attempt it. The people are strong (v. 28), men of a *great stature* (v. 32), *stronger than we*, v. 31. The cities are represented as impregnable fortresses: they *are walled* and *very great*, v. 28. But nothing served their ill purpose more than a description of the giants, on whom they lay a great stress: *We saw the children of Anak there* (v. 28), and again, we *saw the giants*, those men of a prodigious size, the *sons of Anak*, who *come of*

*the giants*, v. 33. They spoke as if they were ready to tremble at the mention of them, as they had done at the sight of them. "O these tremendous giants! when we were near them, *we were in our own sight as grasshoppers*, not only little and weak, but trembling and daunted." Compare Job 39:20, *Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper?* "Nay, and *so we were in their sight*; they looked upon us with as much scorn and disdain as we did upon them with fear and trembling." So that upon the whole matter they gave it in as their judgment, *We are not able to go up against them* (v. 31), and therefore must think of taking some other course.

2. Now, even if they had been to judge only by human probabilities, they could not have been excused from the imputation of cowardice. Were not the hosts of Israel very numerous? 600,000 effective men, well marshalled and modelled, closely embodied, and entirely united in interest and affection, constituted as formidable an army as perhaps was ever brought into the field; many a less has done more than perhaps the conquering of Canaan was, witness Alexander's army. Moses, their commander-in-chief, was wise and brave; and if the people had put on resolution, and behaved themselves valiantly, what could have stood before them? It is true the Canaanites were strong, but they were dispersed (v. 29): *Some dwell in the south and others in the mountains*; so that by reason of their distance they could not soon get together, and by reason of their divided interests they could not long keep together, to oppose Israel. The country being plentiful would subsist an army, and, though the cities were walled, if they could beat them in the field the strong-holds would fall of course into their hands. And, lastly, as for the giants, their overgrown stature would but make them the better mark, and the bulkiest men have not always the best mettle.

3. But, though they deserved to be posted for cowards, this was not the worst, the scripture brands them for unbelievers. It was not any human probabilities they were required to depend upon, but, (1.) They had the manifest and sensible tokens of God's presence with them, and the engagement of his power for them. The Canaanites were stronger than Israel; suppose they were, but were they stronger than the God of Israel? We are not able to deal with them, but is not God Almighty able? Have we not him in the midst of us? Does not he go before us? And is any thing too hard for him? Were we as grasshoppers before the giants, and are not they less than grasshoppers before God? Their cities are walled against us, but can they be walled against heaven? Besides this, (2.) They had had very great experience of the length and strength of God's arm, lifted up and made bare on their behalf. Were not the Egyptians as much stronger than they as the Canaanites were? And yet, without a sword drawn by Israel or a stroke struck, the chariots and horsemen of Egypt were quite routed and ruined; the Amalekites took them at great disadvantages, and yet they were discomfited. Miracles were at this time their daily bread; were there nothing else, an army so well victualled as theirs was, so constantly, so plentifully, and all on free cost, would have a might advantage against any other force. Nay, (3.) They had particular promises made them of victory and success in their wars against the Canaanites. God had given Abraham all possible assurances that he would put his seed into possession of that land, Gen. 15:18; 17:8. He had expressly promised them by Moses that he would *drive out the Canaanites from before them* (Ex. 33:2), and that he would do it *by little and little*, Ex. 23:30. And, after all this, for them to say, *We are not able to go up against them*, was in effect to say, "God himself is not able to make his words good." It was in effect to give him the lie, and to tell him he had undertaken more

than he could perform. We have a short account of their sin, with which they infected the whole congregation, Ps. 106:24. They *despised the land, they believed not his word*. Though, upon search, they had found it as good as he had said, *a land flowing with milk and honey*, yet they would not believe it as sure as he had said, but despaired of having it, though eternal truth itself had engaged it to them. And now this is the representation of the evil spies.

II. Caleb encouraged them to go forward, though he was seconded by Joshua only (v. 30): *Caleb stilled the people*, whom he saw already put into a ferment even *before Moses* himself, whose shining face could not daunt them, when they began to grow unruly. *Caleb* signifies *all heart*, and he answered his name, was hearty himself, and would have made the people so if they would have hearkened to him. If Joshua had begun to stem the tide, he would have been suspected of partiality to Moses, whose minister he was; and therefore he prudently left it to Caleb's management at first, who was of the tribe of Judah, the leading tribe, and therefore the fittest to be heard. Caleb had seen and observed the strength of the inhabitants as much as his fellows, and upon the whole matter, 1. He speaks very confidently of success: *We are well able to overcome them*, as strong as they are. 2. He animates the people to go on, and, his lot lying in the van, he speaks as one resolved to lead them on with bravery: *"Let us go up at once, one bold step, one bold stroke more, will do our business; it is all our own if we have but courage to make it so: Let us go up and possess it."* He does not say, "Let us go up and conquer it;" he looks upon that to be as good as done already; but, "Let us go up and possess it; there is nothing to be done but to enter, and take the possession which God our great Lord is ready to give us." Note, *The righteous are bold as a lion*. Difficulties that lie 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 be but promised, *to him that believes*.

## Chapter 14

This chapter gives us an account of that fatal quarrel between God and Israel upon which, for their murmuring and unbelief, he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. Here is, I. The mutiny and rebellion of Israel against God, upon the report of the evil spies (v. 1-4). II. The fruitless endeavour of Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, to still the tumult (v. 5–10). III. Their utter ruin justly threatened by an offended God (v. 11, 12). IV. The humble intercession of Moses for them (v. 13–19). V. A mitigation of the sentence in answer to the prayer of Moses; they shall not all be cut off, but the decree goes forth ratified with an oath, published to the people, again and again repeated, that this whole congregation should perish in the wilderness, and none of them enter Canaan but Caleb and Joshua only (v. 20–35). VI. The present death of the evil spies (v. 36–39). VII. The rebuke given to those who attempted to go forward notwithstanding (v. 40–45). And this is written for our admonition, that we "fall not after the same example of unbelief."

### Verses 1-4

Here we see what mischief the evil spies made by their unfair representation. We may suppose that these twelve that were impanelled to enquire concerning Canaan had talked it over among themselves before they brought in their report in public; and Caleb and Joshua, it is likely, had done their utmost to bring the rest over to be of their mind, and if they would but have agreed that Caleb, according to his pose, should have spoken for them all, as their foreman, all had been well; but the evil spies, it should seem, wilfully designed to raise this mutiny, purely in opposition to Moses and Aaron, though they could not propose any advantage to themselves by it, unless they hoped to be captains and commanders of the retreat into Egypt they were now meditating. But what came of it? Here in these verses we find those whom they studied to humour put into a vexation, and, before the end of the chapter, brought to ruin. Observe,

I. How the people fretted themselves: *They lifted up their voices and cried* (v. 1); giving credit to the report of the spies rather than to the word of God, and imagining their condition desperate, they laid the reins on the neck of their passions, and could keep no manner of temper. Like foolish forward children, they fall a crying, yet know not what they cry for. It would have been time enough to cry out when the enemy had beaten up their quarters, and they had seen the sons of Anak at the gate of their camp; but those that cried when nothing hurt them deserved to have something given them to cry for. And, as if all had been already gone, they sat down and *wept that night*. Note, Unbelief, or distrust of God, is a sin that is its own punishment. Those that do not trust God are continually vexing themselves. The world's mourners are more than God's, and the *sorrow of the world worketh death*.

II. How they flew in the face of their governors—*murmured against Moses and Aaron*, and in them reproached the Lord, v. 2, 3. The congregation of elders began the discontent (v. 1), but the contagion soon spread through the whole camp, for *the children of Israel murmured*. Jealousies and discontents spread like wildfire among the unthinking multitude, who are easily taught to *despise dominions, and to speak evil of dignities*. 1. They look back with a causeless discontent. They wish that they had died in Egypt with the first-born that were slain there, or in the wilderness with those that lately died of the plague for

lusting. See the prodigious madness of unbridled passions, which make men prodigal even of that which nature accounts most dear, life itself. Never were so many months spent so pleasantly as these which they had spent since they came out of Egypt, loaded with honours, compassed with favours, and continually entertained with something or other that was surprising; and yet, as if all these things had not made it worth their while to live, they wished they had died in Egypt. And such a light opinion they had of God's tremendous judgments executed on their neighbours for their sin that they wished they had shared with them in their plagues, rather than run the hazard of making a descent upon Canaan. They wish rather to die criminals under God's justice than live conquerors in his favour. Some read it, *O that we had died in Egypt, or in the wilderness! O that we might die!* They wish to die, for fear of dying; and have not sense enough to reason as the poor lepers, when rather than die upon the spot they ventured into an enemy's camp, *If they kill us, we shall but die*, 2 Ki. 7:4. How base were the spirits of these degenerate Israelites, who, rather than die (if it come to the worst) like soldiers on the bed of honour, with their swords in their hands, desire to die like rotten sheep in the wilderness. 2. They look forward with a groundless despair, taking it for granted (v. 3) that if they went on they must fall by the sword, and pretend to lay the cause of their fear upon the great care they had for their wives and children, who, they conclude, will be a prey to the Canaanites. And here is a most wicked blasphemous reflection upon God himself, as if he had brought them hither on purpose that they might fall by the sword, and that their wives and children, those poor innocents, should be a prey. Thus do they, in effect, charge that God who is love itself with the worst of malice, and eternal Truth with the basest hypocrisy, suggesting that all the kind things he had said to them, and done for them, hitherto, were intended only to decoy them into a snare, and to cover a secret design carried on all along to ruin them. Daring impudence! But what will not that tongue speak against heaven that is set on fire of hell? The devil keeps up his interest in the hearts of men by insinuating to them ill thoughts of God, as if he desired the death of sinners, and delighted in the hardships and sufferings of his own servants, whereas he knows his thoughts to us-ward (whether we know them so or no) to be *thoughts of good, and not of evil*, Jer. 29:11.

III. How they came at last to this desperate resolve, that, instead of going forward to Canaan, they would go back again to Egypt. The motion is first made by way of query only (v. 3): *Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?* But the ferment being high, and the spirits of the people being disposed to entertain any thing that was perverse, it soon ripened to a resolution, without a debate (v. 4): *Let us make a captain and return to Egypt;* and it is lamented long after (Neh. 9:17) that *in their rebellion they appointed a captain to return to their bondage;* for they knew Moses would not be their captain in this retreat. Now, 1. It was the greatest folly in the world to wish themselves in Egypt, or to think that if they were there it would be better with them than it was. If they durst not go forward to Canaan, yet better be as they were than go back to Egypt. What did they want? What had they to complain of? They had plenty, and peace, and rest, were under a good government, had good company, had the tokens of God's presence with them, and enough to make them easy even in the wilderness, if they had but hearts to be content. But whither were they thus eager to go to better themselves? To Egypt! Had they so soon forgotten the sore bondage they were in there? Would they be again under the tyranny of their taskmasters, and at the drudgery of making brick? And, after all the plagues which Egypt had suffered for their sakes, could they expect any better treatment there than

they had formerly, and not rather much worse? In how little time (not a year and a half) have they forgotten all the sighs of their bondage, and all the songs of their deliverance! Like brute-beasts, they mind only what is present, and their memories, with the other powers of reason, are sacrificed to their passions. See Ps. 106:7. We find it threatened (Deu. 28:68), as the completing of their misery, that they should be brought into Egypt again, and yet this is what they here wish for. Sinners are enemies to themselves; and those that walk not in God's counsels consult their own mischief and ruin. 2. It was a most senseless ridiculous thing to talk of returning thither through the wilderness. Could they expect that God's cloud would lead them or his manna attend them? And, if they did not, the thousands of Israel must unavoidably be lost and perish in the wilderness. Suppose the difficulties of conquering Canaan were as great as they imagined, those of returning to Egypt were much greater. In this let us see, (1.) The folly of discontent and impatience under the crosses of our outward condition. We are uneasy at that which is, complain of our place and lot, and we would shift; 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 into a better frame; and instead of asking, "Were it not better to go to Egypt?" ask, "Were it not better to be content, and make the best of that which is?" (2.) The folly of apostasy from the ways of God. Heaven is the Canaan set before us, a land flowing with milk and honey; those that bring up ever so ill a report of it cannot but say that it is indeed a good land, only it is hard to get to it. Strict and serious godliness is looked upon as an impracticable thing, and this deters many who began well from going on; rather than undergo the imaginary hardships of a religious life, they run themselves upon the certain fatal consequences of a sinful course; and so they transcribe the folly of Israel, who, when they were within a step of Canaan, would make a captain, and return to Egypt.

### **Verses 5-10**

The friends of Israel here interpose to save them if possible from ruining themselves, but in vain. The physicians of their state would have healed them, but they would not be healed; their watchmen gave them warning, but they would not take warning, and so their blood is upon their own heads.

I. The best endeavours were used to still the tumult, and, if now at last they would have understood the things that belonged to their peace, all the following mischief would have been prevented.

1. Moses and Aaron did their part, v. 5. Though it was against them that they murmured (v. 2), yet they bravely overlooked the affront and injury done them, and approved themselves faithful friends to those who were outrageous enemies to them. The clamour and noise of the people were so great that Moses and Aaron could not be heard; should they order any of their servants to proclaim silence, the angry multitude would perhaps be the more clamorous; and therefore, to gain audience in the sight of all the assembly, they fell on their faces, thus expressing, (1.) Their humble prayers to God to still the noise of this sea, the noise of its waves, even the tumult of the people. (2.) The great trouble and concern of their own spirits. They fell down as men astonished and even thunder-struck, amazed to see a people throw away their own mercies: to see those so ill-humoured who were so well taught. And, (3.) Their great earnestness with the people to cease their murmurings; they hoped to work upon them by this humble posture, and to prevail with them not to persist in their rebellion; Moses and Aaron beseech them, as

though by them God himself did beseech them, to be reconciled unto God. What they said to the people Moses relates in the repetition of this story. Deu. 1:29, 30, *Be not afraid; the Lord your God shall fight for you.* Note, Those that are zealous friends to precious souls will stoop to any thing for their salvation. Moses and Aaron, notwithstanding the posts of honour they are in, prostrate themselves to the people to beg of them not to ruin themselves.

2. Caleb and Joshua did their part: they rent their clothes in a holy indignation at the sin of the people, and a holy dread of the wrath of God, which they saw ready to break out against them. it was the greater trouble to these good men because the tumult was occasioned by those spies with whom they had been joined in commission; and therefore they thought themselves obliged to do what they could to still the storm which their fellows had raised. No reasoning could be more pertinent and pathetic than theirs was (v. 7-9), and they spoke as with authority.

(1.) They assured them of the goodness of the land they had surveyed, and that it was really worth venturing for, and not a land that *ate up the inhabitants*, as the evil spies had represented it. It is an *exceedingly good land* (v. 7); it is *very, very good*, so the word is; so that they had no reason to *despise this pleasant land*. Note, If men were but thoroughly convinced of the desirableness of the gains of religion, they would not stick at the services of it.

(2.) They made nothing of the difficulties that seemed to lie in the way of their gaining the possession of it: "*Fear not the people of the land*, v. 9. Whatever formidable ideas have been given you of them, the lion is not so fierce as he is painted. *They are bread for us*," that is, "they are set before us rather to be fed upon than to be fought with, so easily, so pleasantly, and with so much advantage to ourselves shall we master them." Pharaoh is said to have been given them for meat (Ps. 74:14), and the Canaanites will be so too. They show that, whatever was suggested to the contrary, the advantage was clear on Israel's side. For, [1.] Though the Canaanites dwell in walled cities, they are naked: *Their defence has departed from them*; that common providence which preserves the rights of nations has abandoned them, and will be no shelter nor protection to them. The other spies took notice of their strength, but these of their wickedness, and thence inferred that God had forsaken them, and therefore *their defence had departed*. No people can be safe when they have provoked God to leave them. [2.] Though Israel dwell in tents they are fortified: *The Lord is with us*, and his name is a strong tower; *fear them not*. Note, While we have the presence of God with us, we need not fear the most powerful force against us.

(3.) They showed them plainly that all the danger they were in was from their own discontents, and that they would succeed against all their enemies if they did not make God their enemy. On this point alone the cause would turn (v. 8): "*If the Lord delight in us*, as certainly he does, and will if we do not provoke him, *he will bring us into this good land*; we shall without fail get it in possession by his favour, and the light of his countenance (Ps. 44:3), if we do not forfeit his favour and by our own follies turn away our own mercies." It has come to this issue (v. 9): *Only rebel not you against the Lord*. Note, Nothing can ruin sinners but their own rebellion. If God leave them, it is because they drive him from them; and they die because they will die. None are excluded the heavenly Canaan but those that exclude themselves. And, now, could the case have been made more plain? could it have been urged more closely? But what was the effect?

II. It was all to no purpose; they were deaf to this fair reasoning; nay, they were exasperated by it, and grew more outrageous:

*All the congregation bade stone them with stones*, v. 10. The rulers of the congregation, and the great men (so bishop Patrick), ordered the common people to fall upon them, and knock their brains out. Their case was sad indeed when their leaders thus *caused them to err*. Note, It is common for those whose hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* to rage at those who give them good counsel. Those who hate to be reformed hate those that would reform them, and count them their enemies because they tell them the truth. Thus early did Israel begin to misuse the prophets, and *stone those that were sent to them*, and it was this that filled the measure of their sin, Mt. 23:37. *Stone them with stones!* Why, what evil have they done? No crime can be laid to their charge; but the truth is *these two witnesses tormented those* that were obstinate in their infidelity, Rev. 11:10. Caleb and Joshua had but just said, *The Lord is with us; fear them not* (v. 9): and, if Israel will not apply those encouraging words to their own fears, those that uttered them know how to encourage themselves with them against this enraged multitude that spoke of stoning them, as David in a like cause, 1 Sa. 30:6. Those that cannot prevail to edify others with their counsels and comforts should endeavour at least to edify themselves. Caleb and Joshua knew they appeared for God and his glory, and therefore doubted not but God would appear for them and their safety. And they were not disappointed, for immediately *the glory of the Lord appeared*, to the terror and confusion of those that were for stoning the servants of God. When they reflected upon God (v. 3), his glory appeared not to silence their blasphemies; but, when they threatened Caleb and Joshua, they touched the apple of his eye, and his glory appeared immediately. Note, Those who faithfully expose themselves for God are sure to be taken under his special protection, and shall be hidden from the rage of men, either under heaven or in heaven.

### **Verses 11-19**

Here is, I. The righteous sentence which God gave against Israel for their murmuring and unbelief, which, though afterwards mitigated, showed what was the desert of their sin and the demand of injured justice, and what would have been done if Moses had not interposed. When the glory of the Lord *appeared in the tabernacle* we may suppose that Moses took it for a call to him immediately to come and attend there, as before the tabernacle was erected he went up to the mount in a similar case, Ex. 32:30. Thus, while the people were studying to disgrace him, God publicly put honour upon him, as the man of his counsel. Now here we are told what God said to him there.

1. He showed him the great evil of the people's sin, v. 11. What passed between God and Israel went through the hands of Moses: when they were displeased with God they told Moses of it (v. 2); when God was displeased with them he told Moses too, *revealing his secret to his servant the prophet*, Amos 3:7. Two things God justly complains of to Moses:—(1.) Their sin. They *provoke me*, or (as the word signifies) they *reject, reproach, despise me*, for *they will not believe me*. This was the bitter root which bore the gall and wormwood. It was their unbelief that made this a day of provocation in the wilderness, Heb. 3:8. Note, Distrust of God, of his power and promise, is itself a very great provocation, and at the bottom of many other provocations. Unbelief is a great sin (1 Jn. 5:10), and a root sin, Heb. 3:12. (2.) Their continuance in it: *How long will they do so?* Note, The God of heaven keeps an account how long sinners persist in their provocations; and the longer they persist the more he is displeased. The aggravations of their sin were, [1.] Their relation to God: *This people*, a peculiar people, a professing people. The nearer any are to God in name and profession, the more he is provoked by their sins, especially their

unbelief. [2.] The experience they had had of God's power and goodness, in *all the signs* which he *had shown among them*, by which, one would think, he had effectually obliged them to trust him and follow him. The more God has done for us the greater is the provocation if we distrust him.

2. He showed him the sentence which justice passed upon them for it, v. 12. "What remains now but that I should make a full end of them? It will soon be done. *I will smite them with the pestilence*, not leave a man of them alive, but wholly blot out their name and race, and so disinherit them, and be no more troubled with them. *Ah, I will ease me of my adversaries*. They wish to die; and let them die, and neither root nor branch be left of them. Such rebellious children deserve to be disinherited." And if it be asked, "What will become of God's covenant with Abraham then?" here is an answer, "I shall be preserved in the family of Moses: *I will make of thee a greater nation*." Thus, (1.) God would try Moses, whether he still continued that affection for Israel which he formerly expressed upon a like occasion, in preferring their interests before the advancement of his own family; and it is proved that Moses was still of the same public spirit, and could not bear the thought of raising his own name upon the ruin of the name of Israel. (2.) God would teach us that he will not be a loser by the ruin of sinners. If Adam and Eve had been cut off and disinherited, he could have made another Adam and another Eve, and have glorified his mercy in them, as here he could have glorified his mercy in Moses, though Israel had been ruined.

II. The humble intercession Moses made for them. Their sin had made a fatal breach in the wall of their defence, at which destruction would certainly have entered if Moses had not seasonably stepped in and made it good. Here he was a type of Christ, who interceded for his persecutors, and *prayed for those that despitefully used him*, leaving us an example to his own rule, Mt. 5:44.

1. The prayer of his petition is, in one word, *Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people* (v. 19), that is, "Do not bring upon them the ruin they deserve." This was Christ's prayer for those that crucified him, *Father forgive them*. The pardon of a national sin, as such, consists in the turning away of the national punishment; and that is it for which Moses is here so earnest.

2. The pleas are many, and strongly urged.

(1.) He insists most upon the plea that is taken from the glory of God, v. 13–16. With this he begins, and somewhat abruptly, taking occasion from that dreadful word, *I will disinherit them*. *Lord* (says he), *then the Egyptians shall hear it*. God's honour lay nearer to his heart than any interests of his own. Observe how he *orders this cause* before God. He pleads, [1.] That the eyes both of Egypt and Canaan were upon them, and great expectations were raised concerning them. They could not but have heard *that thou, Lord, art among this people*, v. 14. The neighbouring countries rang of it, how much this people were the particular care of heaven, so as never any people under the sun were. [2.] That if they should be cut off great notice would be taken of it. "*The Egyptians will hear it* (v. 13), for they have their spies among us, and they will *tell it to the inhabitants of the land*" (v. 14); for there was great correspondence between Egypt and Canaan, although not by the way of this wilderness. "If this people that have made so great a noise be all consumed, if their mighty pretensions come to nothing, and their light go out in a snuff, it will be told with pleasure in Gath, and published in the streets of Askelon; and what construction will the heathen put upon it? It will be impossible to make them understand it as an act of God's justice, and as such redounding to God's

honour; *brutish men know not this* (Ps. 92:6): but they will impute it to the failing of God's power, and so turn it to his reproach, v. 16. They will say, He slew them in the wilderness because he was not able to bring them to Canaan, his arm being shortened, and his stock of miracles being spent. Now, Lord, let not one attribute be glorified at the expense of another; rather let mercy *rejoice against judgment* than that almighty power should be impeached." Note, The best pleas in prayer are those that are taken from God's honour; for they agree with the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Hallowed be thy name. Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory*. God pleads it with himself (Deu. 32:27), *I feareth the wrath of the enemy*; and we should use it as an argument with ourselves to walk so in every thing as to give no occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, 1 Tim. 6:1.

(2.) He pleads God's proclamation of his name at Horeb (v. 17, 18): *Let the power of the Lord be great*. Power is here put for pardoning mercy; it is his power over his own anger. If he should destroy them, God's power would be questioned; if he should continue and complete their salvation, notwithstanding the difficulties that arose, not only from the strength of their enemies, but from their own provocations, this would greatly magnify the divine power: what cannot he do who could make so weak a people conquerors and such an unworthy people favourites? The more danger there is of others reproaching God's power the more desirous we should be to see it glorified. To enforce this petition, he refers to the word which God had spoken: *The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy*. God's goodness had there been spoken of as his glory; God gloried in it, Ex. 34:6, 7. Now here he prays that upon this occasion he would glorify it. Note, We must take our encouragement in prayer from the word of God, upon which he has *caused us to hope*, Ps. 119:49. "Lord, be and do *according as thou hast spoken*; for hast thou spoken, and wilt thou not make it good?" Three things God had solemnly made a declaration of, which Moses here fastens upon, and improves for the enforcing of his petition:—[1.] The goodness of God's nature in general, that he is long-suffering, or slow to anger, and of great mercy; not soon provoked, but tender and compassionate towards offenders. [2.] His readiness in particular to pardon sin: *Forgiving iniquity and transgression*, sins of all sorts. [3.] His unwillingness to proceed to extremity, even when he does punish. For in this sense the following words may be read: *That will by no means make quite desolate, in visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children*. God had indeed said in the second commandment that he would thus visit, but here he promises not to make a full end of families, churches, and nations, at once; and so it is very applicable to this occasion, for Moses cannot beg that God would not at all punish this sin (it would be too great an encouragement to rebellion if he should set no mark of his displeasure upon it), but that he would not *kill all this people as one man*, v. 15. He does not ask that they may not be corrected, but that they may not be disinherited. And this proclamation of God's name was the more apposite to his purpose because it was made upon occasion of the pardoning of their sin in making the golden calf. This sin which they had now fallen into was bad enough, but it was not idolatry.

(3.) He pleads past experience: *As thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt*, v. 19. This seemed to make against him. Why should those be forgiven any more who, after they had been so often forgiven, revolted yet more and more, and seemed hardened and encouraged in their rebellion by the lenity and patience of their God, and the frequent pardons they had obtained? Among men it would have been thought impolitic to take notice of such a circumstance in a request of this nature, as

it might operate to the prejudice of the petitioner: but, as in other things so in pardoning sin, God's thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, Isa. 55:9. Moses looks upon it as a good plea, *Lord, forgive, as thou hast forgiven*. It will be no more a reproach to thy justice, nor any less the praise of thy mercy, to forgive now, than it has been formerly. Therefore the *sons of Jacob are not consumed*, because they have to do with a *God that changes not*, Mal. 3:6.

### Verses 20-35

We have here God's answer to the prayer of Moses, which sings both of mercy and judgment. It is given privately to Moses (v. 20–25), and then directed to be made public to the people, v. 26–35. The frequent repetitions of the same things in it speak these resolves to be unalterable. Let us see the particulars.

I. The extremity of the sentence is receded from (v. 20): "*I have pardoned*, so as not to cut them all off at once, and disinherit them." See the power of prayer, and the delight God takes in putting an honour upon it. He designed a pardon, but Moses shall have the praise of obtaining it by prayer: it shall be done *according to thy word*; thus, as a prince, he has power with God, and prevails. See what countenance and encouragement God gives to our intercessions for others, that we may be public-spirited in prayer. Here is a whole nation rescued from ruin by the effectual fervent prayer of one righteous man. See how ready God is to forgive sin, and how easy to be entreated: *Pardon*, says Moses (v. 19); *I have pardoned*, says God, v. 20. David found him thus swift to show mercy, Ps. 32:5. *He deals not with us after our sins*, Ps. 103:10.

II. The glorifying of God's name is, in the general, resolved upon, v. 21. It is said, it is sworn, *All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*. Moses in his prayer had shown a great concern for the glory of God. "Let me alone," says God, "to secure that effectually, and to advance it, by this dispensation." All the world shall see how God hates sin even in his own people, and will reckon for it, and yet how gracious and merciful he is, and how slow to anger. Thus when our Saviour prayed, *Father, glorify thy name*, he was immediately answered, *I have glorified it, and will glorify it yet again*, Jn. 12:28. Note, Those that sincerely seek God's glory may be sure of what they seek. God having turned this prayer for the glorifying of himself into a promise, we may turn it into praise, in concert with the angels, Isa. 6:3, *The earth is full of his glory*.

III. The sin of this people which provoked God to proceed against them is here aggravated, v. 22, 27. It is not made worse than really it was, but is shown to be exceedingly sinful. It was an evil congregation, each bad, but altogether in congregation, very bad. 1. They tempted God—tempted his power, whether he could help them in their straits—his goodness, whether he would—and his faithfulness, whether his promise would be performed. They tempted his justice, whether he would resent their provocations and punish them or no. They dared him, and in effect challenged him, as God does the idols (Isa. 41:23), to do *good*, or do *evil*. 2. They murmured against him. This is much insisted on, v. 27. As they questioned what he would do, so they quarrelled with him for every thing he did or had done, continually fretting and finding fault. It does not appear that they murmured at any of the laws or ordinances that God gave them (though they proved a heavy yoke), but they murmured at the conduct they were under, and the provision made for them. Note, It is much easier to bring ourselves to the external services of religion, and observe all the formalities of devotion, than to live a life of dependence upon, and submission to, the divine Providence in the course of our conversation. 3. They did this after they had seen God's miracles in Egypt and in the

wilderness, v. 2. They would not believe their own eyes, which were witnesses for God that he was in the midst of them of a truth. 4. They had repeated the provocations ten times, that is, very often: the Jewish writers reckon this exactly the tenth time that the body of the congregation had provoked God. First, at the Red Sea, Ex. 14:11. In Marah, Ex. 15:23, 24. In the wilderness of Sin, Ex. 16:2. At Rephidim, Ex. 17:1, 2. The golden calf, Ex. 32. Then at Taberah. Then at Kibroth-Hattaavah, ch. 11. And so this was the tenth. Note, God keeps an account how often we repeat our provocations, and will sooner or later set them in order before us. 5. They had not hearkened to his voice, though he had again and again admonished them of their sin.

IV. The sentence passed upon them for this sin. 1. That they should not see the promised land (v. 23), nor *come into it*, v. 30. *He swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest*, Ps. 95:11. Note, Disbelief of the promise is a forfeiture of the benefit of it. Those that despise the pleasant land shall be shut out of it. The promise of God should be fulfilled to their posterity, but not to them. 2. That they should immediately *turn back into the wilderness*, v. 25. Their next remove should be a retreat. They must face about, and instead of going forward to Canaan, on the very borders of which they now were, they must withdraw towards the Red Sea again. *To-morrow turn you*; that is, "Very shortly you shall be brought back to that vast howling wilderness which you are so weary of. And it is time to shift for your own safety, for *the Amalekites lie in wait in the valley*, ready to attack you if you march forward." Of them they had been distrustfully afraid (ch. 13:29), and now with them God justly frightened them. *The fear of the wicked shall come upon him*. 3. That all those who had now grown up to men's estate should die in the wilderness, not all at once, but by degrees. They wished that they might die in the wilderness, and God said *Amen* to their passionate wish, and made their sin their ruin, *snares them in the words of their mouth*, and *caused their own tongue to fall upon them*, took them at their word, and determined that their *carcasses should fall in the wilderness*, v. 28, 29, and again, v. 32, 35. See with what contempt they are spoken of, now that they had by their sin made themselves vile; the mighty men of valour were but carcasses, when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from them. They were all as dead men. Their fathers had such a value for Canaan that they desired to have their dead bodies carried thither to be buried, in token of their dependence upon God's promise that they should have that land for a possession: but these, having despised that good land and disbelieved the promise of it, shall not have the honour to be buried in it, but shall have their graves in the wilderness. 4. That in pursuance of this sentence they should wander to and fro in the wilderness, like travellers that have lost themselves, for forty years; that is, so long as to make it full forty years from their coming out of Egypt to their entrance into Canaan, v. 33, 34. Thus long they were kept wandering, (1.) To answer the number of the days in which the spies were searching the land. They were content to wait forty days for the testimony of men, because they could not take God's word; and therefore justly are they kept forty years waiting for the performance of God's promise. (2.) That hereby they might be brought to repentance, and find mercy with God in the other world, whatever became of them in this. Now they had time to bethink themselves, and to consider their ways; and the inconveniences of the wilderness would help to humble them and prove them, and *show them what was in their heart*, Deu. 8:2. Thus long they *bore their iniquities*, feeling the weight of God's wrath in the punishment. They were made to groan under the burden of their own sin that brought it upon them, which was *too heavy for them to bear*.

(3.) That they might sensibly feel what a dangerous thing it is for God's covenant-people to break with him: "*You 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 it will produce your ruin; you are quite undone when you are thrown out of covenant." (4.) That a new generation might in this time be raised up, which could not be done all of a sudden. And the children, being brought up under the tokens of God's displeasure against their fathers, and so *bearing their whoredoms* (that is, the punishment of their sins, especially their idolatry about the golden calf, which God now remembered against them), might take warning not to tread in the steps of their fathers' disobedience. And their wandering so long in the wilderness would make Canaan at last the more welcome to them. It should seem that upon occasion of this sentence Moses penned the ninetieth Psalm, which is very apposite to the present state of Israel, and wherein they are taught to pray that since this sentence could not be reversed it might be sanctified, and they might learn to *apply their hearts unto wisdom*.

V. The mercy that was mixed with this severe sentence.

1. Mercy to Caleb and Joshua, that though they should wander with the rest in the wilderness, yet they, and only they of all that were now above twenty years old, should survive the years of banishment, and live to enter Canaan. Caleb only is spoken of (v. 24), and a particular mark of honour put upon him, both, (1.) In the character given of him: he had *another spirit*, different from the rest of the spies, an *after-spirit*, which furnished him with second thoughts, and he *followed the Lord fully*, kept close to his duty, and went through with it, though deserted and threatened; and, (2.) In the recompence promised to him: *Him will I bring in due time into the land whereinto he went*. Note, [1.] It ought to be the great care and endeavour of every one of us to follow the Lord fully. We must, in a course of obedience to God's will and of service to his honour, follow him universally, without dividing,—uprightly, without dissembling,—cheerfully, without disputing,—and constantly, without declining; and this is following him fully. [2.] Those that would follow God fully must have another spirit, another from the spirit of the world, and another from what their own spirit has been. They must have the spirit of Caleb. [3.] Those that follow God fully in times of general apostasy God will own and honour by singular preservations in times of general calamity. The heavenly Canaan shall be the everlasting inheritance of those that follow the Lord fully. When Caleb is again mentioned (v. 30) Joshua stands with him, compassed with the same favours and crowned with the same honours, having stood with him in the same services.

2. Mercy to the children even of these rebels. They should have a seed preserved, and Canaan secured to that seed: *Your little ones*, now under twenty years old, *which you*, in your unbelief, *said should be a prey, them will I bring in*, v. 31. They had invidiously charged God with a design to ruin their children, v. 3. But 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 the promise made to Abraham, though it seemed to fail for a time, was kept from failing for evermore; and, though God chastened their transgressions with a rod, yet his *loving kindness he would not utterly take away*.

### **Verses 36-45**

Here is, I. The sudden death of the ten evil spies. While the sentence was passing upon the people, before it was published,

they died of the plague before the Lord, v. 36, 37. Now,

1. God hereby showed his particular displeasure against those who *sinned and made Israel to sin*. (1.) They sinned themselves, in bringing up a slander upon the land of promise. Note, Those greatly provoke God who misrepresent religion, cast reproach upon it, and raise prejudices in men's minds against it, or give occasion to those to do so who seek occasion. Those that represent the service of God as mean and despicable, melancholy and uncomfortable, hard and impracticable, needless and unprofitable, bring up an *evil report* upon the good land, *pervert the right ways of the Lord*, and in effect give him the lie. (2.) They *made Israel to sin*. They designedly *made all the congregation murmur* against God. Note, Ring-leaders in sin may expect to fall under particular marks of the wrath of God, who will severely reckon for the blood of souls, which is thus spilt.

2. God hereby showed what he could have done with the whole congregation, and gave an earnest of the execution of the sentence now passed upon them. He that thus cut off one of a tribe could have cut off their whole tribes suddenly, and would do it gradually. Note, The remarkable deaths of notorious sinners are earnest of the final perdition of ungodly men, 2 Pt. 2:5, 6. Thus the wrath of God is revealed, that sinners may hear and fear.

II. The special preservation of Caleb and Joshua: *They lived still*, v. 38. It is probable that all the twelve spies stood together, for the eyes of all Israel were now upon them; and therefore it is taken notice of as very remarkable, and which could not but be affecting to the whole congregation, that when the ten evil spies fell down dead of the plague, a malignant infectious distemper, yet these two that stood among them lived, and were well. God hereby confirmed their testimony, and put those to confusion that spoke of stoning them. He likewise gave them an assurance of their continued preservation in the wilderness, when thousands should fall on their right hand and on their left, Ps. 91:7. Death never misses his mark, nor takes any by oversight that were designed for life, though in the midst of those that were to die.

III. The publication of the sentence to all the people, v. 36. He told them all what the decree was which had gone forth concerning them, and which could not be reversed, that they must all die in the wilderness, and Canaan must be reserved for the next generation. It was a very great disappointment, we may well think, to Moses himself, who longed to be in Canaan, as well as to all the people; yet he acquiesced, but they wept and mourned greatly. The assurance which Moses had of God's being glorified by this sentence gave him satisfaction, while the consciousness of their own guilt, and their having procured it to themselves, gave them the greatest vexation. They wept for nothing (v. 1), and now they have cause given them to weep; so justly are murmurers made mourners. If they had mourned for the sin when they were faithfully reprov'd for it (v. 9), the sentence would have been prevented; but now that they mourned for the judgment only their grief came too late, and did them no service; they *found no place for repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears*, Heb. 12:17. Such mourning as this there is in hell, but the tears will not quench the flames, no, nor cool the tongue.

IV. The foolish fruitless attempts of some of the Israelites to enter Canaan, notwithstanding the sentence.

1. They were now eager to go forward towards Canaan, v. 40. They were up early, mustered all their force, got together in a body, and begged of Moses to lead them on against the enemy, and now there is no more talk among them of making a captain to return into Egypt. They confess their fault: *We have sinned*; they profess reformation: *Lo, we be here, and will go up*. They

now desire the land which they had despised, and put a confidence in the promise which they had distrusted. Thus when God judges he will overcome, and, first or last, will convince sinners of the evil of all their ungodly deeds, and hard speeches, and force them to recall their own words. But, though God was glorified by this recantation of theirs, they were not benefited by it, because it came too late. The decree had gone forth, the consumption was determined; they did not seek the Lord while he might be found, and now he would not be found. O, if men would but be as earnest for heaven while their day of grace lasts as they will be when it is over, would be as solicitous to provide themselves with oil while the bridegroom tarrys as they will be when the bridegroom comes, how well were it for them!

2. Moses utterly disallows their motion, and forbids the expedition they were meditating: *Go not up*, v. 41–43. (1.) He gives them warning of the sin; it is *transgressing the commandment of the Lord*, who had expressly ordered them, when they did move, to move back towards the Red Sea. Note, That which has been duty, in its season, when it comes to be mistimed may be turned into sin. It is true the command he refers to was in the nature of a punishment, but he that has not obeyed the law is obliged to submit to the penalty, for the Lord is our Judge as well as Lawgiver. (2.) He gives them this warning of the danger: *"It shall not prosper*, never expect it." Note, It is folly to promise ourselves success in that which we undertake contrary to the mind of God. *"The Canaanites are before you* to attack you, and *the Lord is not among you* to protect you and fight for you, and therefore look to yourselves *that you be not smitten before your enemies*." Those that are out of the way of their duty are from under God's protection, and go at their peril. It is dangerous going where we cannot expect God should go along with us. Nay, he plainly foresees and foretels their defeat: *You shall fall by the sword* of the Amalekites and Canaanites (who were to have fallen by their sword); *Because you are turned away from the Lord*, from following the guidance of his precept and promise, *therefore the Lord will not be with you*. Note, God will certainly leave those that leave him; and those that are left of him lie exposed to all misery.

3. They venture notwithstanding. Never was people so perverse and so desperately resolved in every thing to walk contrary to God. God bade them go, and they would not; he forbade them, and they would. Thus is the *carnal mind enmity to God*: *They presumed to go up unto the hill-top*, v. 44. Here, (1.) They struggled against the sentence of divine justice, and would press on in defiance of it. (2.) They slighted the tokens of God's presence, for they would go though they left Moses and the ark of the covenant behind them. They had distrusted God's strength, and now they presume upon their own without his.

4. The expedition speeds accordingly, v. 45. The enemy had posted themselves upon the top of the hill, to make good that pass against the invaders, and, being informed by their scouts of their approach, sallied out upon them, and defeated them, and it is probable that many of the Israelites were killed. Now the sentence began to be executed that their *carcasses should fall in the wilderness*. Note, That affair can never end well that begins with sin. The way to obtain peace with our friends, and success against our enemies, is to make God our friend, and keep ourselves in his love. The Jews, like these their ancestors, when they had rejected Christ's righteousness, attempted to establish their own, and it sped as this.

## Chapter 15

This chapter, which is mostly concerning sacrifice and offering, comes in between the story of two rebellions (one ch. 14, the other ch. 16), to signify that these legal institutions were typical of the gifts which Christ was to receive even for the rebellious, Ps. 68:18. In the foregoing chapter, upon Israel's provocation, God had determined to destroy them, and in token of his wrath had sentenced them to perish in the wilderness. But, upon Moses' intercession, he said, "I have pardoned;" and, in token of that mercy, in this chapter he repeats and explains some of the laws concerning offerings, to show that he was reconciled to them, notwithstanding the severe dispensation they were under, and would not unchurch them. Here is, I. The law concerning the meat-offerings and drink-offerings (v. 1–12) both for Israelites and for strangers (v. 13–16), and a law concerning the heave-offerings of the first of their dough (v. 17–21). II. The law concerning sacrifices for sins of ignorance (v. 22–29). III. The punishment of presumptuous sins (v. 30, 31), and an instance given in the sabbath-breaker (v. 32–36). IV. A law concerning fringes, for memorandums, upon the borders of their garments (v. 37, etc.).

### Verses 1-21

Here we have,

I. Full instructions given concerning the meat-offerings and drink-offerings, which were appendages to all the sacrifices of animals. The beginning of this law is very encouraging: *When you come into the land of your habitation which I give unto you, they you shall do so and so*, v. 2. This was a plain intimation, not only that God was reconciled to them notwithstanding the sentence he had passed upon them, but that he would secure the promised land to their seed notwithstanding their proneness to rebel against him. They might think some time or other they should be guilty of a misdemeanour that would be fatal to them, and would exclude them for ever, as the last had done for one generation; but this intimates an assurance that they should be kept from provoking God to such a degree as would amount to a forfeiture; for this statute takes it for granted that there were some of them that should in due time come into Canaan. The meat-offerings were of two sorts; some were offered alone, and we have the law concerning those, Lev. 2:1, etc. Others were added to the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and constantly attended them, and about these direction is here given. It was requisite, since the sacrifices of acknowledgment (specified in v. 3) were intended as the food of God's table, that there should be a constant provision of bread, oil, and wine, whatever the flesh-meat was. The caterers or purveyors for Solomon's temple provided *fine flour*, 1 Ki. 4:22. And it was fit that God should keep a good house, that his table should be furnished with bread as well as flesh, and that his cup should run over. In my Father's house there is bread enough. Now the intent of this law is to direct what proportion the meat-offering and drink-offering should bear to several sacrifices to which they were annexed. If the sacrifice was a lamb or a kid, then the meat-offering must be a tenth-deal of flour, that is, an omer, which contained about five pints; this must be mingled with oil, the fourth part of a hin (a hin contained about five quarts), and the drink-offering must be the same quantity of wine, about a quart and half a pint, v. 3-5. If it was a ram, the meat-offering was doubled, two tenth-deals of flour, about five quarts, and a third part of a hin of oil (which was to them as butter is to us) mingled with it; and the same quantity of wine for a drink-offering, v.

6, 7. If the sacrifice was a bullock, the meat-offering was to be trebled, three omers, with five pints of oil, and the same quantity of wine for a drink-offering, v. 8–10. And thus for each sacrifice, whether offered by a particular person or at the common charge. Note, Our religious services should be governed, as by other rules, so by the rule of proportion.

II. Natives and strangers are here set upon a level, in this as in other matters (v. 13–16): "*One law shall be for you and for the stranger* that is proselyted to the Jewish religion." Now, 1. This was an invitation to the Gentiles to become proselytes, and to embrace the faith and worship of the true God. In civil things there was a difference between strangers and true-born Israelites, but not in the things of God; *as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord*, for with him there is no respect of persons. See Isa. 56:3. 2. This was an obligation upon the Jews to be kind to strangers, and not to oppress them, because they saw them owned and accepted of God. Communion in religion is a great engagement to mutual affection, and should slay all enmities. 3. It was a mortification to the pride of the Jews, who are apt to be puffed up with their birthright privileges. "We are Abraham's seed." God let them know that the sons of the stranger were as welcome to him as the sons of Jacob; no man's birth or parentage shall turn either to his advantage or his prejudice in his acceptance with God. This likewise intimated that, as believing strangers should be accounted Israelites, so unbelieving Israelites should be accounted strangers. 4. It was a happy presage 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 make, which broke down the partition-wall, and reconciled both to God in one sacrifice, without the observance of the legal ceremonies.

III. A law for the offering of the first of their dough unto the Lord. This, as the former, goes upon the comfortable supposition of their having *come into the promised land*, v. 18. Now that they lived upon manna they needed not such an express acknowledgment of God's title to their daily bread, and their dependence upon him for it, the thing spoke for itself; but in Canaan, where they should eat the fruit of their own industry, God required that he should be owned as their landlord and their great benefactor. They must not only offer him the first-fruits and tenths of the corn in their fields (these had already been reserved); but when they had it in their houses, in their kneading trough, when it was almost ready to be set upon their tables, God must have a further tribute of acknowledgment, part of their dough (the Jews say a fortieth part, at least, of the whole lump) must be heaved or offered up to God (v. 20, 21), and the priest must have it for the use of his family. Thus they must own their dependence upon God for their daily bread, even when they had it in the house with them; they must then wait on God for the comfortable use of it; for we read of that which was brought home, and yet God did blow upon it, and it came to little, Hag. 1:9. Christ has taught us to pray not, *Give us this year our yearly harvest*, but *Give us this day our daily bread*. God by this law said to the people, as the prophet long afterwards said to the widow of Sarepta (1 Ki. 17:13), *Only make me thereof a little cake first*. This offering was expressly kept up by the laws of Ezekiel's visionary temple, and it is a commandment with promise of family-mercies (Eze. 44:30): *You shall give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thy house*; for, when God has had his dues out of our estates, we may expect the comfort of what falls to our share.

### **Verses 22-29**

We have here the laws concerning sacrifices for sins of ignorance; the Jews understand it of idolatry, or false worship, through

the error of their teachers. The case here supposed is that they *had not observed all these commandments*, v. 22, 23. If they had failed in the offerings of their acknowledgment, and had not brought them according to the law, then they must bring an offering of atonement, yea, though the omission had been through forgetfulness or mistake. If they failed in one part of the ceremony, they must make it up by the observance of another part, which was in the nature of a remedial law. 1. The case is put of a national sin, committed through ignorance, and become customary through a vulgar error (v. 24)—*the congregation*, that is, the body of the people, for so it is explained (v. 25): *All the congregation of the children of Israel*. The ceremonial observances were so numerous, and so various, that, it might easily be supposed, some of them by degrees would be forgotten and disused, as particularly that immediately before concerning the heave-offering of their dough: now if, in process of time, upon consulting the law, there should appear to have been a general neglect of that or any other appointment, then a sacrifice must be offered for the whole congregation, and the oversight shall be forgiven (v. 25, 26) and not punished, as it deserved, with some national judgment. The offering of the sacrifice *according to the manner, or ordinance*, plainly refers to a former statute, of which this is the repetition; and the same bullock which is there called *a sin-offering* (Lev. 4:13, 21) is here called *a burnt-offering* (v. 24), because it was wholly burnt, though not upon the altar, yet without the camp. And here is the addition of *a kid of the goats for a sin-offering*. According to this law, we find that Hezekiah made atonement for the errors of his father's reign, by *seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats*, which he offered as a *sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah* (2 Chr. 29:21), and *for all Israel*, v. 24. And we find the like done after the return out of captivity, Ezra 8:35. 2. It is likewise supposed to be the case of a particular person: *If any soul sin through ignorance* (v. 27), neglecting any part of his duty, he must bring his offering, as was appointed, Lev. 4:27, etc. Thus atonement shall be made *for the soul that sins, when he sins through ignorance*, v. 28. Observe, (1.) Sins committed ignorantly need to have atonement made for them; for, though ignorance will in a degree excuse, it will not justify those that might have known their Lord's will and did it not. David prayed to be cleansed from his *secret faults*, that is, those sins which he himself was not aware of, the errors he did not understand, Ps. 19:12. (2.) 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 the intention of his offering in that prayer, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. And Paul seems to allude to this law concerning sins of ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13), *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief*. And it looked favourable upon the Gentiles that this law of atoning for sins of ignorance is expressly made to extend to those who were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel (v. 29), but supposed to be *proselytes of righteousness*. Thus the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles.

### **Verses 30-36**

Here is, I. The general doom passed upon presumptuous sinners. 1. Those are to be reckoned presumptuous sinners that sin *with a high hand*, as the original phrase is (v. 30), that is, that avowedly confront God's authority, and set up their own lust in competition with it, that sin for sinning-sake, in contradiction to the precept of the law, and in defiance of the penalty, that fight against God, and dare him to do his worst; see Job 15:25. It is not only to sin against knowledge, but to sin designedly against God's will and glory. 2. Sins thus committed are exceedingly sinful. He that thus breaks the commandment, (1.) *Reproaches*

*the Lord* (v. 30); he says the worst he can of him, and most unjustly. The language of presumptuous sin is, "Eternal truth is not fit to be believed, the Lord of all not fit to be obeyed, and almighty power not fit to be either feared or trusted." It imputes folly to Infinite Wisdom, and iniquity to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth; such is the malignity of wilful sin. (2.) He *despises the word of the Lord*, v. 31. There are those who, in many instances, come short of fulfilling the word, and yet have a great value for it, and count the law honourable; but presumptuous sinners despise it, thinking themselves too great, too good, and too wise, to be ruled by it. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Whatever the sin itself is, it is contumacy that incurs the anathema. It is rebellion added to the sin that is as witch-craft, and stubbornness as idolatry. 3. The sentence passed on such is dreadful. There remains no sacrifice for those sins; the law provided none: *That soul shall be cut off from among his people* (v. 30), *utterly cut off* (v. 31); and that God may be for ever justified, and the sinner for ever confounded, *his iniquity shall be upon him*, and there needs no more to sink him to the lowest hell. Thus the Jewish doctors understand it, that *the iniquity shall cleave to the soul, after it is cut off, and that man shall give an account of his sin at the great day of judgment*. Perhaps the kind of offence might be such as did not expose the offender to the censure of the civil magistrate, but, if it was done presumptuously, God himself would take the punishment of it into his own hands, and into them it is a fearful thing to fall. In the New Testament we find the like sentence of exclusion from all benefit by the great sacrifice passed upon the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and a total apostasy from Christianity.

II. A particular instance of presumption in the sin of sabbath-breaking. 1. The offence was the gathering of sticks on the sabbath day (v. 32), which, it is probable, were designed to make a fire of, whereas they were commanded to bake and seeth what they had occasion for the day before, Ex. 16:23. This seemed but a small offence, but it was a violation of the law of the sabbath, and so was a tacit contempt of the Creator, to whose honour the sabbath was dedicated, and an incursion upon the whole law, which the sabbath was intended as a hedge about. And it appears by the context to have been done presumptuously, and in affront both of the law and to the Law-maker. 2. The offender was secured, v. 33, 34. Those that found him *gathering sticks*, in their zeal for the honour of the sabbath, *brought him to Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation*, which intimates that being the sabbath day the congregation was at that time gathered to Moses and Aaron, to receive instruction from them, and to join with them in religious worship. It seems, even common Israelites, though there was much amiss among them, yet would not contentedly see the sabbath profaned, which was a good sign that they had not quite forsaken God, nor were utterly forsaken of him. 3. God was consulted, *because it was not declared what should be done to him*. The law had already made the profanation of the sabbath a capital crime (Ex. 31:14, ch. 35:2); but they were in doubt, either concerning the offence (whether this that he had done should be deemed a profanation or no) or concerning the punishment, which death he should die. God was the Judge, and before him they brought this cause. 4. Sentence was passed; the prisoner was adjudged a sabbath-breaker, according to the intent of that law, and as such he must be put to death; and to show how great the crime was, and how displeasing to God, and that others might hear and fear and not do in like manner presumptuously, that death is appointed him which was looked upon as most terrible: He must be *stoned with stones*, v. 35. Note, God is jealous for the honour of his sabbaths, and will not hold those guiltless, whatever men do, that profane them. 5. Execution was done pursuant to the

sentence, v. 36. He was *stoned* to death *by the congregation*. As many as could were employed in the execution, that those, at least, might be afraid of breaking the sabbath, who had thrown a stone at this sabbath-breaker. This intimates that the open profanation of the sabbath is a sin which ought to be punished and restrained by the civil magistrate, who, as far as overt acts go, is keeper of both tables. See Neh. 13:17. One would think there could be no great harm in gathering a few sticks, on what day soever it was, but God intended the exemplary punishment of him that did so for a standing warning to us all, to make conscience of keeping holy the sabbath.

### **Verses 37-41**

Provision had been just now made by the law for the pardon of sins of ignorance and infirmity; now here is an expedient provided for the preventing of such sins. They are ordered to make fringes upon the borders of their garments, which were to be memorandums to them of their duty, that they might not sin through forgetfulness. 1. The sign appointed is a fringe of silk, or thread, or worsted, or the garment itself ravelled at the bottom, and a blue riband bound on the top of it to keep it tight, v. 38. The Jews being a peculiar people, they were thus distinguished from their neighbours in their dress, as well as in their diet, and taught by such little instances of singularity not to be conformed to the way of the heathen in greater things. Thus likewise they proclaimed themselves Jews wherever they were, as those that were not ashamed of God and his law. Our Saviour, being made under the law, wore these fringes; hence we read of the hem or border, of his garment, Mt. 9:20. These borders the Pharisees enlarged, that they might be thought more holy and devout than other people. The phylacteries were different things; these were their own invention, the fringes were a divine institution. The Jews at this day wear them, saying, when they put them on, *Blessed be he who has sanctified us unto himself, and commanded us to wear fringes*. 2. The intention of it was to remind them that they were a peculiar people. They were not appointed for the trimming and adorning of their clothes, but *to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance* (2 Pt. 3:1), that they might *look upon the fringe and remember the commandments*. Many look upon their ornaments to feed their pride, but they must look upon these ornaments to awaken their consciences to a sense of their duty, that their religion might constantly beset them, and that they might carry it about with them, as they did their clothes, wherever they went. If they were tempted to sin, the fringe would be a monitor to them not to break God's commandments: If a duty was forgotten to be done in its season, the fringe would remind them of it. This institution, though it is not an imposition upon us, is an instruction to us, always to *remember the commandments of the Lord our God*, that we *may do them*, to treasure them up in our memories, and to apply them to particular cases as there is occasion to use them. It was intended particularly to be a preservative from idolatry: that you *seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes*, in your religious worship. Yet it may extend also to the whole conversation, for nothing is more contrary to God's honour, and our own true interest, than to *walk in the way of our heart* and in *the sight of our eyes*; for the *imagination of the heart is evil*, and so is the *lust of the eyes*.

After the repetition of some ceremonial appointments, the chapter closes with that great and fundamental law of religion, *Be holy unto your God*, purged from sin, and sincerely devoted to his service; and that great reason for all the commandments is again and again inculcated, *I am the Lord your God*. Did we more firmly believe, and more frequently and seriously consider,

that God is the Lord, and our God and Redeemer, we should see ourselves bound in duty, interest, and gratitude, to keep all his commandments.

## Chapter 16

The date of the history contained in this chapter is altogether uncertain. Probably these mutinies happened after their removal back again from Kadesh-barnea, when they were fixed (if I may so speak) for their wandering in the wilderness, and began to look upon that as their settlement. Presently after new laws given follows the story of a new rebellion, as if sin took occasion from the commandment to become more exceedingly sinful. Here is, I. A daring and dangerous rebellion raised against Moses and Aaron, by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (v. 1–15). 1. Korah and his accomplices contend for the priesthood against Aaron (v. 3). Moses reasons with them, and appeals to God for a decision of the controversy (v. 4–11). 2. Dathan and Abiram quarrel with Moses, and refuse to obey his summons, which greatly grieves him (v. 12–15). II. A solemn appearance of the pretenders to the priesthood before God, according to order, and a public appearance of the glory of the Lord, which would have consumed the whole congregation if Moses and Aaron had not interceded (v. 16–22). III. The deciding of the controversy, and the crushing of the rebellion, by the cutting off of the rebels. 1. Those in their tents were buried alive (v. 23–34). 2. Those at the door of the tabernacle were consumed by fire (v. 35), and their censers preserved for a memorial (v. 37–40). IV. A new insurrection of the people (v. 41–43). 1. God stayed in the insurrection by a plague (v. 45). 2. Aaron stayed the plague by offering incense (v. 46–50). The manner and method of recording this story plainly show the ferment to have been very great.

### Verses 1-11

Here is, I. An account of the rebels, who and what they were, not, as formerly, the mixed multitude and the dregs of the people, who are therefore never named, but men of distinction and quality, that made a figure. Korah was the ring-leader: he formed and headed the faction; therefore it is called *the gainsaying of Korah*, Jude 11. He was cousin-german to Moses, they were brothers' children, yet the nearness of the relation could not restrain him from being insolent and rude to Moses. Think it not strange if a man's foes be *those of his own house*. With him joined Dathan and Abiram, chief men of the tribe of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob. Probably Korah was disgusted both at the preferment of Aaron to the priesthood and the constituting of Elizaphan to the head of the Kohathites (ch. 3:30); and perhaps the Reubenites were angry that the tribe of Judah had the first post of honour in the camp. *On* is mentioned (v. 1) as one of the heads of the faction, but never after in the whole story, either because, as some think, he repented and left them, or because he did not make himself so remarkable as Dathan and Abiram did. The Kohathites encamped on the same side of the tabernacle that the Reubenites did, which perhaps gave Korah an opportunity of drawing them in, whence the Jews say, *Woe to the wicked man, and woe to his neighbour*, who is in danger of being infected by him. And, these being themselves *men of renown*, they seduced into the conspiracy *two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly* (v. 2); probably they were first-born, or at least heads of families, who, before the elevation of Aaron, had themselves ministered in holy things. Note, The pride, ambition, and emulation, of great men, have always been the occasion of a great deal of mischief both in churches and states. God by his grace make great men humble, and so give peace in our time, O Lord! Famous men, and men of renown, as these are described to be, were the great sinners of the old world, Gen. 6:4. The fame and renown which they had did not content them; they were high, but would be higher, and thus the

famous men became infamous.

II. The rebels' remonstrance, v. 3. That which they quarrel with is the settlement of the priesthood upon Aaron and his family, which they think an honour too great for Moses to give and Aaron to accept, and so they are both charged with usurpation: *You take too much upon you*; or, "Let it suffice you to have domineered thus long, and now think of resigning your places to those who have as good a title to them and are as well able to manage them." 1. They proudly boast of the holiness of the congregation, and the presence of God in it. "They are *holy, every one of them*, and as fit to be employed in offering sacrifice as Aaron is, and as masters of families formerly were, and *the Lord is among them*, to direct and own them." Small reason they had to boast of the people's purity, or of God's favour, as the people had been so frequently and so lately polluted with sin, and were now under the marks of God's displeasure, which should have made them thankful for priests to mediate between them and God; but, instead of that, they envy them. 2. They unjustly charge Moses and Aaron with taking the honour they had to themselves, whereas it was evident, beyond contradiction, that they were called of God to it, Heb. 5:4. So that they would either have no priests at all, nor any government, none to preside either in civil or sacred things, none over the congregation, none above it, or they would not acquiesce in that constitution of the government which God had appointed. See here, (1.) What spirit levellers are of, and those that despise dominions, and resist the powers that God has set over them; they are proud, envious, ambitious, turbulent, wicked, and unreasonable men. (2.) What usage even the best and most useful men may expect, even from those they have been serviceable to. If those be represented as usurpers that have the best titles, and those as tyrants that govern best, let them recollect that Moses and Aaron were thus abused.

III. Moses's conduct when their remonstrance was published against him. How did he take it?

1. He *fell on his face* (v. 4), as before, ch. 14:5. Thus he showed how willing he would have been to yield to them, and how gladly he would have resigned his government, if it would have consisted with his duty to God and his fidelity to the trust reposed in him. Thus also he applied to God, by prayer, for direction what to say and to do upon this sad occasion. He would not speak to them till he had thus humbled and composed his own spirit (which could not but begin to be heated), and had received instruction from God. The *heart of the wise* in such a case *studies to answer*, and asks counsel at God's mouth.

2. He agrees to refer the case to God, and leave it to him to decide it, as one well assured of the goodness of his title, and yet well content to resign, if God thought fit, to gratify this discontented people with another nomination. An honest cause fears not a speedy trial; even to-morrow let it be brought on, v. 5-7. Let Korah and his partisans bring their censers, and offer incense before the Lord, and, if he testify his acceptance of them, well and good; Moses is now as willing that all the Lord's people should be priests, if God so pleased, as before that they should all be prophets, ch. 11:29. But if God, upon an appeal to him, determine (as no doubt he would) for Aaron, they would find it highly dangerous to make the experiment: and therefore he puts it off till to-morrow, to try whether, when they had slept upon it, they would desist, and let fall their pretensions.

3. He argues the case fairly with them, to still the mutiny with fair reasoning, if possible, before the appeal came to God's tribunal, for then he knew it would end in the confusion of the complainants.

(1.) He calls them *the sons of Levi*, v. 7, and again v. 8. They were of his own tribe, nay, they were of God's tribe; it was

therefore the worse in them thus to mutiny both against God and against him. It was not long since the sons of Levi had bravely appeared on God's side, in the matter of the golden calf, and got immortal honour by it; and shall those that were then the only innocents now be the leading criminals, and lose all the honour they had won? Could there be such chaff on God's floor? Levites, and yet rebels?

(2.) He retorts their charge upon themselves. They had unjustly charged Moses and Aaron with taking too much upon them, though they had done no more than what God put upon them; nay, says Moses, *You take too much upon you, you sons of Levi*. Note, Those that take upon them to control and contradict God's appointment take too much upon them. It is enough for us to submit; it is too much to prescribe.

(3.) He shows them the privilege they had as Levites, which was sufficient for them, they needed not to aspire to the honour of the priesthood, v. 9, 10. He reminds them how great the honour was to which they were preferred, as Levites. [1.] They were *separated from the congregation of Israel*, distinguished from them, dignified above them; instead of complaining that Aaron's family was advanced above theirs, they ought to have been thankful that their tribe was advanced above the rest of the tribes, though they had been in all respects upon the level with them. Note, It will help to keep us from envying those that are above us duly to consider how many there are below us. Instead of fretting that any are preferred before us in honour, power, estate, or interest, in gifts, graces, or usefulness, we have reason to bless God if we, who are less than the least, are not put among the very last. Many perhaps who deserve better are not preferred so well. [2.] They were separated to very great and valuable honours, *First, To draw near to God*, nearer than the common Israelites, though they also were a people near unto him; the nearer any are to God the greater is their honour. *Secondly, To do the service of the tabernacle*. It is honour enough to bear the vessels of the sanctuary, and to be employed in any part of the service of the tabernacle. God's service is not only perfect freedom, but high preferment. *Thirdly, To stand before the congregation to minister unto them*. Note, Those are truly great that serve the public, and it is the honour of God's ministers to be the church's ministers; nay, which adds to the dignity put upon them, [3.] It was the God of Israel himself that separated them. It was his act and deed to put them into their place, and therefore they ought not to have been discontented: and he it was likewise that put Aaron into his place, and therefore they ought not to have envied him.

(4.) He convicts them of the sin of undervaluing those privileges: *Seemeth it a small thing unto you?* As if he had said, "It ill becomes you of all men to grudge Aaron the priesthood, when at the same time that he was advanced to that honour you were designed for another honour dependent upon it, and shine with rays borrowed from him." Note, [1.] The privilege of drawing near to the God of Israel is not a small thing in itself, and therefore must not appear small to us. To those who neglect opportunities of drawing near to God, who are careless and formal in it, to whom it is a task and not a pleasure, we may properly put this question: "Seemeth it a small thing to you that God has made you a people near unto him?" [2.] Those who aspire after and usurp the honours forbidden them put a great contempt upon the honours allowed them. We have each of us as good a share of reputation as God sees fit for us, and sees us fit for, and much better than we deserve; and we ought to rest satisfied with it, and not, as these, *exercise ourselves in things too high for us: Seek you the priesthood also?* They would not

*own* that they sought it, but Moses saw that they had this in their eye; the law had provided very well for those that served at the altar, and therefore they would put in for the office.

(5.) He interprets their mutiny to be a rebellion against God (v. 11); while they pretended to assert the holiness and liberty of the Israel of God, they really took up arms against the God of Israel: *You are gathered together against the Lord*. Note, Those that strive against God's ordinances and providences, whatever they pretend, and whether they are aware of it or no, do indeed strive with their Maker. Those resist the prince who resist those that are commissioned by him: for, alas! says Moses, *What is Aaron, that you murmur against him?* If murmurers and complainers would consider that the instruments they quarrel with are but instruments whom God employs, and that they are but what he makes them, and neither more nor less, better nor worse, they would not be so bold and free in their censures and reproaches as they are. Those that found the priesthood, as it was settled, a blessing, must give all the praise to God; but if any found it a burden they must not therefore quarrel with Aaron, who is but what he is made, and does but as he is bidden. Thus he interested God in the cause, and so might be sure of speeding well in his appeal.

### **Verses 12-22**

Here is, I. The insolence of Dathan and Abiram, and their treasonable remonstrance. Moses had heard what Korah had to say, and had answered it; now he summons Dathan and Abiram to bring in their complaints (v. 12); but they would not obey his summons, either because they could not for shame say that to his face which they were resolved to say, and then it is an instance of some remains of modesty in them; or, rather, because they would not so far own his authority, and then it is an instance of the highest degree of impudence. They spoke the language of Pharaoh himself, who set Moses at defiance, but they forgot how dearly he paid for it. Had not their heads been wretchedly heated, and their hearts hardened, they might have considered that, if they regarded not these messengers, Moses could soon in God's name send messengers of death for them. But thus the God of this world *blinds the minds of those that believe not*. But by the same messengers they send their articles of impeachment against Moses; and the charge runs very high. 1. They charge him with having done them a great deal of wrong in bringing them out of Egypt, invidiously calling that *a land flowing with milk and honey*, v. 13. Onions, and garlick, and fish, they had indeed plenty of in Egypt, but it never pretended to milk and honey; only they would thus banter the promise of Canaan. Ungrateful wretches, to represent that as an injury to them which was really the greatest favour that ever was bestowed upon any people! 2. They charge him with a design upon their lives, that he intended to *kill them in the wilderness*, though they were so well provided for. And, if they were sentenced to die in the wilderness, they must thank themselves. Moses would have healed them, and they would not be healed. 3. They charge him with a design upon their liberties, that he meant to enslave them, by *making himself a prince over them*. A prince over them! Was he not a tender father to them? nay, their devoted servant for the Lord's sake? Had they not their properties secured, their order preserved, and justice impartially administered? Did they not live in ease and honour? And yet they complain as if Moses's yoke were heavier than Pharaoh's. And did Moses make himself a prince? Far from it. How gladly would he have declined the office at first! How gladly would he have resigned it many a time since! And yet he is thus put under the blackest characters of a tyrant and a usurper. 4. They

charge him with cheating them, raising their expectations of a good land, and then defeating them (v. 14): *Thou hast not brought us, as thou promisedst us, into a land that floweth with milk and honey;* and pray whose fault was that? He had brought them to the borders of it, and was just ready, under God, to put them in possession of it; but they thrust it away from them, and shut the door against themselves; so that it was purely their own fault that they were not now in Canaan, and yet Moses must bear the blame. Thus when the *foolishness of man perverteth his way his heart fretteth against the Lord*, Prov. 19:3. 5. They charge him in the general with unfair dealing, that he put *out the eyes of these men*, and then meant to lead them blindfold as he pleased. The design of all he did for them was to open their eyes, and yet they insinuate that he intended to put out their eyes, that they might not see themselves imposed upon. Note, The wisest and best cannot please every body, nor gain the good word of all. Those often fall under the heaviest censures who have merited the highest applause. Many a good work Moses had shown them from the Father, and for which of these do they reproach him?

II. Moses's just resentment of their insolence, v. 15. Moses, though the meekest man, yet, finding God reproached in him, *was very wroth*; he could not bear to see a people ruining themselves for whose salvation he had done so much. In this discomposure,

1. He appeals to God concerning his own integrity; whereas they basely reflected upon him as ambitious, covetous, and oppressive, in making himself a prince over them, God was his witness, (1.) That he never got any thing by them: *I have not taken one ass from them*, not only not by way of bribery and extortion, but not by way of recompence or gratuity for all the good offices he had done them; he never took the pay of a general, or the salary of a judge, much less the tribute of a prince. He got more in his estate when he kept Jethro's flock than when he came to be king in Jeshurun. (2.) That they never lost any thing by him: *Neither have I hurt any one of them*, no, not the least, no, not the worst, no, not those that had been most peevish and provoking to him: he never abused his power to the support of wrong. Note, Those that have never blemished themselves need not fear being slurred by others: when men condemn us we may be easy, if our own hearts condemn us not.

2. He begs of God to plead his cause, and clear him, by showing his displeasure at the incense which Korah and his company were to offer, with whom Dathan and Abiram were in confederacy. Lord, says he, *Respect not thou their offering*. Herein he seems to refer to the history of Cain, lately written by his own hand, of whom it is said that to him and his offering God had not respect, Gen. 4:5. These that *followed the gainsaying of Korah walked in the way of Cain* (these are put together, Jude 11), and therefore he prays that they might be frowned upon as Cain was, and put to the same confusion.

III. Issue joined between Moses and his accusers. 1. Moses challenges them to appear with Aaron next morning, at the time of offering up the morning incense, and refer the matter to God's judgment, v. 16, 17. Since he could not convince them by his calm and affectionate reasoning, he is ready to enter into bonds to stand God's award, not doubting but that God would appear, to decide the controversy. This reference he had agreed to before (v. 6, 7), and here adds only one clause, which bespeaks his great condescension to the plaintiffs, that Aaron, against whose advancement they excepted, though now advanced by the divine institution to the honour of burning incense within the tabernacle, yet, upon this trial, should put himself into the place of a probationer, and stand upon the level with Korah, at the door of the tabernacle; nay, and Moses himself would stand with

them, so that the complainant shall have all the fair dealing he can desire; and thus *every mouth shall be stopped*. 2. Korah accepts the challenge, and makes his appearance with Moses and Aaron *at the door of the tabernacle*, to make good his pretensions, v. 18, 19. If he had not had a very great stock of impudence, he could not have carried on the matter thus far. Had not he lately seen Nadab and Abihu, the consecrated priests, struck dead for daring to offer incense with unhallowed fire? and could he and his accomplices expect to fare any better in offering incense with unhallowed hands? Yet, to confront Moses and Aaron, in the height of his pride he thus bids defiance to Heaven, and pretends to demand the divine acceptance without a divine warrant; thus wretchedly is the heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. They *took every man his censer*. Perhaps these were some of the censers which these heads of families had made use of at their family-altars, before this part of religious service was confined to the priesthood and the altar in the tabernacle (and they would bring them into use and reputation again); or they might be common chafing-dishes, which were for their ordinary use. Now to attend the solemn trial, and to be witness of the issue, one would have thought Moses should have *gathered the congregation against the rebels*, but it seems Korah gathered them against Moses (v. 19), which intimates that a great part of the congregation sided with Korah, were at his beck, and wished him success, and that Korah's hopes were very high of carrying the point against Aaron; for, had he suspected the event, he would not have coveted to make the trial thus public: but little did he think that he was now calling the congregation together to be the witnesses of his own confusion! Note, Proud and ambitious men, while they are projecting their own advancement, often prove to have been hurrying on their own shameful fall.

IV. The judgment set, and the Judge taking the tribunal, and threatening to give sentence against the whole congregation. 1. *The glory of the Lord appeared*, v. 19. The same glory that appeared to instal Aaron in his office at first (Lev. 9:23) now appeared to confirm him in it, and to confound those that oppose him, and set up themselves in competition with him. The *Shechinah*, or divine Majesty, the glory of the eternal Word, which ordinarily dwelt between the cherubim within the veil, now was publicly seen over the door of the tabernacle, to the terror of the whole congregation; for, though they saw no manner of similitude, yet probably the appearances of the light and fire were such as plainly showed God to be angry with them; as when he appeared, ch. 14:10. Nothing is more terrible to those who are conscious of guilt than the appearances of divine glory; for such a glorious Being must needs be a formidable enemy. 2. God threatened to *consume them all in a moment*, and, in order to that, bade Moses and Aaron stand from among them, v. 21. God thus showed what their sin deserved, and how very provoking it was to him. See what a dangerous thing it is to have fellowship with sinners, and in the least to partake with them. Many of the congregation, it is likely, came only for company, following the crowd, or for curiosity, to see the issue, yet not coming, as they ought to have done, to bear their testimony against the rebels, and openly to declare for God and Moses, they had like to have been all consumed in a moment. If we follow the herd into which the devil has entered, it is at our peril.

V. The humble intercession of Moses and Aaron for the congregation, v. 22. 1. Their posture was importuning: they *fell on their faces*, prostrating themselves before God, as supplicants in good earnest, that they might prevail for sparing mercy. Though the people had treacherously deserted them, and struck in with those that were in arms against them, yet they approved themselves faithful to the trusts reposed in them, as shepherds of Israel, who were to stand in the breach when they saw the

flock in danger. Note, If others fail in their duty to us, this does not discharge us from our duty to them, nor take off the obligations we lie under to seek their welfare. 2. Their prayer was a pleading prayer, and it proved a prevailing one. Now God would have *destroyed them* if Moses had not *turned away his wrath* (Ps. 106:23); yet far be it from us to imagine that Moses was more considerate or more compassionate than God in such a case as this: but God saw fit to show his just displeasure against the sin of sinners by the sentence, and at the same time to show his gracious condescension to the prayers of the saints, by the revocation of the sentence at the intercession of Moses. Observe in the prayer, (1.) The title they give to God: *The God of the spirits of all flesh*. See what man is; he is a spirit in flesh, a soul embodied, a creature wonderfully compounded of heaven and earth. See what God is; he is the God of the spirits of all mankind. *He forms the spirit*, Zec. 12:1. *He fathers it*, Heb. 12:9. He has an ability to fashion it (Ps. 33:15), and authority to dispose of it, for he has said, *All souls are mine*, Eze. 18:4. They insinuate hereby that though, as *the God of the spirits of all flesh*, he might in sovereignty consume this congregation in a moment, yet it was to be hoped that he would in mercy spare them, not only because they were the work of his own hands, and he had a propriety in them, but because, being the *God of spirits*, he knew their frame, and could distinguish between the leaders and the led, between those who sinned maliciously and those who were drawn in by their wiles, and would make a difference accordingly in his judgments. (2.) The argument they insist on; it is much the same with that which Abraham urged in his intercession for Sodom (Gen. 18:23): *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?* Such is the plea here: *Shall one man sin and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?* Not but that it was the sin of them all to join in this matter, but the great transgression was his that first hatched the treason. Note, Whatever God may do in sovereignty and strict justice, we have reason to hope that he will not destroy a congregation for the sin of one, but that, *righteousness and peace having kissed each other* in the undertaking of the Redeemer, *mercy shall rejoice against judgment*. Moses knew that all the congregation must perish in the wilderness by degrees, yet he is thus earnest in prayer that they might not be consumed at once, and would reckon it a favour to obtain a reprieve. *Lord, let it alone this year*.

### **Verses 23-34**

We have here the determining of the controversy with Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against Moses, as in the next paragraph the determining of the controversy with Korah and his company, who would be rivals with Aaron. It should seem that Dathan and Abiram had set up a spacious tabernacle in the midst of the tents of their families, where they kept court, met in council, and hung out their flag of defiance against Moses; it is here called *the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram*, v. 24, 27. There, as in the place of rendezvous, Dathan and Abiram staid, when Korah and his friends went up to the tabernacle of the Lord, waiting the issue of their trial; but here we are told how they had their business done, before that trial was over. For God will take what method he pleases in his judgments.

I. Public warning is given to the congregation to withdraw immediately from the tents of the rebels. 1. God bids Moses speak to this purport, v. 24. This was in answer to Moses's prayer. He had begged that God would not *destroy the whole congregation*. "Well," says God, "I will not, provided they be so wise as to shift for their own safety, and get out of the way of danger. If they will quit the rebels, well and good, they shall not perish with them; otherwise, let them take what follows."

Note, We cannot expect to reap benefit by the prayers of our friends for our salvation, unless we ourselves be diligent and faithful in making use of the means of salvation; for God never promised to save by miracles those that would not save themselves by means. Moses that had prayed for them must preach this to them, and warn them to *flee from this wrath to come*. 2. Moses accordingly repairs to the head-quarters of the rebels, leaving Aaron at the door of the tabernacle, v. 25. Dathan and Abiram had contumaciously refused to come up to him (v. 12), yet he humbly condescends to go down to them, to try if he could yet convince and reclaim them. Ministers must thus with meekness instruct those that oppose themselves, and not think it below them to stoop to those that are most stubborn, for their good. Christ himself stretches out his hand to a rebellious and gainsaying people. The seventy elders of Israel attend Moses and his guard, to secure him from the insolence of the rabble, and by their presence to put an honour upon him, and if possible to strike an awe upon the rebels. It is our duty to contribute all we can to the countenance and support of injured innocency and honour. 3. Proclamation is made that all manner of persons, as they tendered their own safety, should forthwith *depart from the tents of these wicked men* (v. 26), and thus should signify that they deserted their cause and interest, detested their crimes and counsels, and dreaded the punishment coming upon them. Note, Those that would not perish with sinners must *come out from among them*, and be separate. In vain do we pray, *Gather not our souls with sinners*, if we save not ourselves from the *untoward generation*. God's people are called out of Babylon, lest they share both in her sins and in her plagues, Rev. 18:4.

II. The congregation takes the warning, but the rebels themselves continue obstinate, v. 27. 1. God, in mercy, inclined the people to forsake the rebels: *They got up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram*, both those whose lot it was to pitch near them (who doubtless with themselves removed their families, and all their effects) and those also who had come from all parts of their camp to see the issue. It was in answer to the prayer of Moses that God thus stirred up the hearts of the congregation to shift for their own preservation. Note, To those whom God will save he gives repentance, that they may *recover themselves out of the snare of the devil*. Grace to separate from evil doers is one of the things that accompany salvation. 2. God, in justice, left the rebels to the obstinacy and hardness of their own hearts. Though they saw themselves abandoned by all their neighbours, and set up as a mark to the arrows of God's justice, yet instead of falling down and humbling themselves before God and Moses, owning their crime and begging pardon, instead of fleeing and dispersing themselves to seek for shelter in the crowd, they impudently *stood in the doors of their tents*, as if they would out-face God himself, and dare him to his worst. Thus were their hearts hardened to their own destruction, and they were fearless when their case was most fearful. But what a pity was it that their little children, who were not capable of guilt or fear, should by the presumption of their parents be put in this audacious posture! Happy they who are taught betimes to bow before God, and not as those unhappy little ones to stand it out against him!

III. Sentence is solemnly pronounced upon them by Moses in the name of the Lord, and the decision of the controversy is put upon the execution of that sentence by the almighty power of God. Moses, by divine instinct and direction, when the eyes of all Israel were fastened upon him, waiting the event, moved with a just and holy indignation at the impudence of the rebels, boldly puts the whole matter to a surprising issue, v. 28–30. 1. If the rebels die a common death, he will be content to be called

and counted an impostor; not only if they die a natural death, but if they die by any sort of judgment that has formerly been executed on other malefactors. "If they die by the plague, or by fire from heaven, or by the sword, then say, God has disowned Moses;" but, 2. "If the earth open and swallow them up" (a punishment without precedent), "then let all the house of Israel know assuredly that I am God's servant, sent by him, and employed for him, and that those that fight against me fight against him." The judgment itself would have been proof enough of God's displeasure against the rebels, and would have given all men to *understand that they had provoked the Lord*; but when it was thus solemnly foretold and appealed to by Moses beforehand, when there was not the least previous indication of it from without, the convincing evidence of it was much the stronger, and it was put beyond dispute that he was not only a servant but a favourite of Heaven, who was so intimately acquainted with the divine counsels, and could obtain such extraordinary appearances of the divine power in his vindication.

IV. Execution is immediately done. It appeared that God and his servant Moses understood one another very well; for, as soon as ever Moses had spoken the word, God did the work, the earth *clave asunder* (v. 31), *opened her mouth, and swallowed them all up*, them and theirs (v. 32), and then *closed upon them*, v. 33. This judgment was, 1. Unparalleled. God, in it, *created a new thing*, did what he never did before; for he has many arrows in his quiver; and there are diversities of operations in wrath as well as mercy. Dathan and Abiram thought themselves safe because they were at a distance from the *shechinah*, whence the fire of the Lord had sometimes issued, *qui procul à Jove (they say) procul à fulmine—he who is far from Jove is far from the thunderbolt*. But God made them to know that he was not tied up to one way of punishing; the earth, when he pleases, shall serve his justice as effectually as the fire. 2. It was very terrible to the sinners themselves to go down alive into their own graves, to be dead and buried in an instant, to go down thus to the bars of the pit when they were in their *full strength wholly at ease and quiet*. 3. It was severe upon their poor children, who, for the greater terror of the judgment, and fuller indication of the divine wrath, perished as parts of their parents, in which, though we cannot particularly tell how bad they might be to deserve it or how good God might be otherwise to them to compensate it, yet of this we are sure in the general, that Infinite Justice did them no wrong. *Far be it from God that he should do iniquity*. 4. It was altogether miraculous. The cleaving of the earth was as wonderful, and as much above the power of nature, as the cleaving of the sea, and the closing of the earth again more so than the closing of the waters. God has all the creatures at his command, and can make any of them, when he pleases, instruments of his justice; nor will any of them be our friends if he be our enemy. God now confirmed to Israel what Moses had lately taught them in that prayer of his, Ps. 90:11, *Who knows the power of thy anger?* He has, when he pleases, *strange punishments for the workers of iniquity*, Job 31:3. Let us therefore conclude, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* 5. It was very significant. They *set their mouths against the heavens, and their throat was an open sepulchre*; justly therefore does the earth open her mouth upon them and swallow them up. They made a rent in the congregation; justly therefore is the earth rent under them. Presumptuous sinners, that hate to be reformed, are a burden to the earth, the whole creation groans under them, which here was signified by this, that the earth sunk under these rebels, as weary of bearing them and being under them. And, considering how the earth is still in like manner loaded with the weight of iniquity, we have reason to wonder that this was the only time it ever sunk under its load. 6. It was typical of the eternal ruin of sinners who die impenitent, who,

perhaps in allusion to this, are said to *sink down into the pit* (Ps. 9:15) and to *go down quickly into hell*, Ps. 55:15. But David, even when he *sinks in deep mire*, yet prays in faith, *Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me*, as it does on the damned, between whom and life there is a gulf fixed, Ps. 69:2–15. His case was bad, but not, like this, desperate.

V. All Israel is alarmed at the judgment: *They fled at the cry of them*, v. 34. They cried for help when it was too late. Their doleful shrieks, instead of fetching their neighbours in to their relief, drove them so much the further off; for knowing their own guilt, and one another's, they hastened one another, saying, *Lest the earth swallow us up also*. Note, Others' ruins should be our warnings. Could we by faith hear the outcries of those that have gone down to the bottomless pit, we should give more diligence than we do to escape for our lives, lest we also come into that condemnation.

### **Verses 35–40**

We must now look back to the door of the tabernacle, where we left the pretenders to the priesthood with their censers in their hands ready to offer incense; and here we find,

I. Vengeance taken on them, v. 35. It is probable that when the earth opened in the camp to swallow up Dathan and Abiram *a fire went out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men that offered incense*, while Aaron that stood with them was preserved alive. This punishment was not indeed so new a thing as the former, for Nadab and Abihu thus died; but it was not less strange or dreadful, and in it it appeared, 1. That *our God is a consuming fire*. Is thunder a sensible indication of the terror of his voice? Lightning is also the power of his hand. We must see in this his fiery indignation which devours the adversaries, and infer from it what a fearful thing it is to *fall into the hands of the living God*, Heb. 10:27–31. 2. That it is at our peril if we meddle with that which does not belong to us. God is jealous of the honour of his own institutions, and will not have them invaded. It is most probable that Korah himself was consumed with those 250 that presumed to offer incense; for the priesthood was the thing he aimed at, and therefore we have reason to think that he would not quit his post at the door of the tabernacle. But, behold, those are made sacrifices to the justice of God who flattered themselves with the hopes of being priests. Had they been content with their office as Levites, which was sacred and honourable, and better than they deserved, they might have lived and died with joy and reputation; but, like the angels that sinned, *leaving their first estate*, and aiming at the honours that were not appointed them, they were thrust down to *Hades*, their censers struck out of their hands, and their breath out of their bodies, by a burning which typified *the vengeance of eternal fire*.

II. Care is taken to perpetuate the remembrance of this vengeance. No mention is made of the taking up of their carcasses: the scripture leaves them as dung upon the face of the earth; but orders are given about their censers, 1. That they be secured, because they are hallowed. Eleazar is charged with this, v. 37. Those invaders of the priesthood had proceeded so far, by the divine patience and submission, as to kindle their incense with fire from off the altar, which they were suffered to use by way of experiment: but, as soon as they had kindled their fire, God kindled another, which put a fatal final period to their pretensions; now Eleazar is ordered to scatter the fire, with the incense that was kindled with it, in some unclean place without the camp, to signify God's abhorrence of their offering as a polluted thing: *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*. But he is to gather up the censers out of the mingled burning, God's fire and theirs, because *they are hallowed*. Having

been once put to a holy use, and that by God's own order (though only for trial), they must not return to common service; so some understand it: rather, *they are devoted*, they are an anathema; and therefore, as all devoted things, they must be made some way or other serviceable to the glory of God. 2. That they be used in the service of the sanctuary, not as censers, which would rather have put honour upon the usurpers whose disgrace was intended; nor was there occasion for brazen censers, the golden altar was served with golden ones; but they must be beaten into *broad plates for a covering of the brazen altar*, v. 38–40. These pretenders thought to have ruined the altar, by laying the priesthood in common again; but to show that Aaron's office was so far from being shaken by their impotent malice that it was rather confirmed by it, their censers, which offered to rival his, were used both for the adorning and for the preserving of the altar at which he ministered. Yet this was not all; this covering of the altar must be a *memorial to the children of Israel*, throughout their generations, of this great event. Though there was so much in it astonishing, and though Moses was to record it in his history, yet there was danger of its being forgotten in process of time; impressions that seem deep are not always durable; therefore it was necessary to appoint this record of the judgment, that the Levites who attended this altar, and had their inferior services appointed them, might learn to keep within their bounds, and be afraid of transgressing them, lest they should be made like Korah and his company, who were Levites, and would have been priests. These censers were preserved *in terrorem*, that others might hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously. Thus God has provided that his wonderful works, both in mercy and judgment, should be had in everlasting remembrance, that the end of them may be answered, and they may serve for instruction and admonition to those *on whom the ends of the world are come*.

#### **Verses 41-50**

Here is, I. A new rebellion raised the very next day against Moses and Aaron. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and wonder, O earth! Was there ever such an instance of the incurable corruption of sinners? *On the morrow* (v. 41) the body of the people mutinied. 1. Though they were so lately terrified by the sight of the punishment of the rebels. The shrieks of those sinking sinners, those sinners against their own souls, were yet sounding in their ears, the smell of the fire yet remained, and the gaping earth was scarcely thoroughly closed, and yet the same sins were re-acted and all these warnings slighted. 2. Though they were so lately saved from sharing in the same punishment, and the survivors were *as brands plucked out of the burning*, yet they fly in the face of Moses and Aaron, to whose intercession they owed their preservation. Their charge runs very high: *You have killed the people of the Lord*. Could any thing have been said more unjustly and maliciously? They canonize the rebels, calling those the people of the Lord who died in arms against him. They stigmatize divine justice itself. It was plain enough that Moses and Aaron had no hand in their death (they did what they could to save them), so that in charging them with murder they did in effect charge God himself with it. The continued obstinacy of this people, notwithstanding the terrors of God's law as it was given on Mount Sinai, and the terrors of his judgments as they were here executed on the disobedient, shows how necessary the grace of God is to the effectual change of men's hearts and lives, without which the most likely means will never attain the end. Love will do what fear could not.

II. God's speedy appearance against the rebels. When they had *gathered against Moses and Aaron*, perhaps with a design to

depose or murder them, they *looked towards the tabernacle*, as if their misgiving consciences expected some frowns thence, and, *behold, the glory of the Lord appeared* (v. 42), for the protection of his servants, and the confusion of his and their accusers and adversaries. Moses and Aaron thereupon came before the tabernacle, partly for their own safety (there they took sanctuary from the strife of tongues, Ps. 27:5; 31:20), and partly for advice, to know what was the mind of God upon this occasion, v. 43. Justice hereupon declares that they deserve to be *consumed in a moment*, v. 45. Why should those live another day who hate to be reformed, and whose rebellions are their daily practices? Let just vengeance take place and do its work, and the trouble will soon be over; only Moses and Aaron must first be secured.

III. The intercession which Moses and Aaron made for them. Though they had as much reason, one would think, as Elias had to make intercession against Israel (Rom. 11:2), yet they forgive and forget the indignities offered them, and are the best friends their enemies have. 1. They both *fell on their faces*, humbly to intercede with God for mercy, knowing how great the provocation was. This they had done several times before, upon similar occasions; and, though the people had basely requited them for it, yet, God having graciously accepted them, they still have recourse to the same method. This is praying always. 2. Moses, perceiving that the *plague had begun in the congregation* of the rebels (that is, that body of them which was gathered against Moses), sent Aaron by an act of his priestly office to make atonement for them, v. 46. And Aaron readily went and burned incense between the living and the dead, not to purify the infected air, but to pacify an offended God, and so stayed the progress of the judgment. By this it appeared, (1.) That Aaron was a very good man, and a man that had a true love for the children of his people, though they hated and envied him. Though God was now avenging his quarrel and pleading the cause of his priesthood, yet he interposes to turn away God's wrath. Nay, forgetting his age and gravity, he ran into the midst of the congregation to help them. He did not say, "Let them smart awhile, and then, when I come, I shall be the more welcome;" but, as one tender of the life of every Israelite, he makes all possible speed into the gap at which death was entering. Moses and Aaron, who had been charged with killing the people of the Lord, might justly have upbraided them now; could they expect those to be their saviours whom they had so invidiously called their murderers? But those good men have taught us here by their example not to be sullen towards those that are peevish with us, nor to take the advantage which men give us by their provoking language to deny them any real kindness which it is in the power of our hands to do them. We must render good for evil. (2.) That Aaron was a very bold man—bold to venture into the midst of an enraged rabble that were gathered together against him, and who, for aught he knew, might be the more exasperated by the plague that had begun—bold to venture into the midst of the infection, where the arrows of death flew thickest, and hundreds, nay thousands, were falling on the right hand and on the left. To save their lives he put his own into his hand, not counting it dear to him, so that he might but fulfil his ministry. (3.) That Aaron was a man of God, and *ordained for men, in things pertaining to God*. His call to the priesthood was hereby abundantly confirmed and set above all contradiction; God had not only saved his life when the intruders were cut off, but now made him an instrument for saving Israel. Compare the censer of Aaron here with the *censers of those sinners against their own souls*. Those provoked God's anger, this pacified it; those destroyed men's lives, this saved them; no room therefore is left to doubt of Aaron's call to the priesthood. Note, Those make out the best title to public honours that lay out themselves

the most for public good and obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful and useful. If any man will be great, let him make himself the servant of all. (4.) That Aaron was a type of Christ, who came into the world to make an atonement for sin and to turn away the wrath of God from us, and who, by his mediation and intercession, *stands between the living and the dead*, to secure his chosen Israel to himself, and save them out of the midst of a world infected with sin and the curse.

IV. The result and issue of the whole matter. 1. God's justice was glorified in the death of some. Great execution the sword of the Lord did in a very little time. Though Aaron made all the haste he could, yet, before he could reach his post of service, there were 14,700 men laid dead upon the spot, v. 49. There were but few comparatively that died about the matter of Korah, the ring-leaders only were made examples; but, the people not being led to repentance by the patience and forbearance of God with them, justice is not now so sparing of the blood of Israelites. They complained of the death of a few hundreds as an unmerciful slaughter made among the *people of the Lord*, but here God silences that complaint by the slaughter of many thousands. Note, Those that quarrel with less judgments prepare greater for themselves; for when God judges he will overcome. 2. His mercy was glorified in the preservation of the rest. God showed them what he could do by his power, and what he might do in justice, but then showed them what he would do in his love and pity: he would, notwithstanding all this, preserve them a people to himself in and by a mediator. The cloud of Aaron's incense coming from his hand stayed the plague. Note, It is much for the glory of God's goodness that many a time even in wrath he remembers mercy. And, even when judgments have been begun, prayer puts a stop to them; so ready is he to forgive, and so little pleasure does he take in the death of sinners.

## Chapter 17

Enough had been done in the chapter before to quash all pretensions of the families of the tribe of Levi that would set up in competition with Aaron, and to make it appear that Aaron was the head of the tribe; but it seems, when that matter was settled, the princes of the rest of the tribes began to murmur. If the head of a tribe must be a priest, why not the head of some other tribe than that of Levi? He that searches the heart knew this thought to be in the breast of some of them, and before it broke out into any overt act graciously anticipated it, to prevent bloodshed; and it is done by miracle in this chapter, not a miracle of wrath, as before, but of grace. I. The matter is put upon trial by the bringing of twelve rods, one for each prince, before the Lord (v. 1-7). II. Upon trial, the matter is determined by the miraculous blossoming of Aaron's rod (v. 8, 9). III. The decision of the controversy is registered by the preservation of the rod (v. 10, 11). IV. The people acquiesce in it with some reluctance (v. 12, 13).

### Verses 1-7

Here we have, I. Orders given for the bringing in of a rod for every tribe (which was peculiarly significant, for the word here used for a rod sometimes signifies a tribe, as particularly ch. 34:13), that God by a miracle, wrought on purpose, might make it known on whom he had conferred the honour of the priesthood. 1. It seems then the priesthood was a preferment worth seeking and striving for, even by the princes of the tribes. It is an honour to the greatest of men to be employed in the service of God. Yet perhaps these contended for it rather for the sake of the profit and power that attended the office than for the sake of that in it which was divine and sacred. 2. It seems likewise, after all that had been done to settle this matter, there were those who would be ready upon any occasion to contest it. They would not acquiesce in the divine appointment, but would make an interest in opposition to it. They strive with God for the dominion; and the question is whose will shall stand. God will rule, but Israel will not be ruled; and this is the quarrel. 3. It is an instance of the grace of God that, having wrought divers miracles to punish sin, he would work one more on purpose to prevent it. God has effectually provided that the obstinate shall be left inexcusable, and every mouth shall be stopped. Israel were very prone to murmur both against God and against their governors. "Now," said God, *"I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel,* v. 5. If any thing will convince them, they shall be convinced; and, if this will not convince them, nothing will." This was to be to them, as Christ said the sign of the prophet Jonas (that is, his own resurrection) should be to the men of that generation, the highest proof of his mission that should be given them. The directions are, (1.) That twelve rods or staves should be brought in. It is probable that they were not now fresh cut out of a tree, for then the miracle would not have been so great; but that they were the staves which the princes ordinarily used as ensigns of their authority (of which we read ch. 21:18), old dry staves, that had no sap in them, and it is probable that they were all made of the almond-tree. It should seem they were but twelve in all, with Aaron's, for, when Levi comes into the account, Ephraim and Manasseh make but one, under the name of Joseph. (2.) That the name of each prince should be written upon his rod, that every man might know his own, and to prevent contests. Writing is often a good preservative against strife, for what is written may be appealed to. (3.) That they should be laid up in the tabernacle, for

one night, before the testimony, that is, before the ark, which, with its mercy seat, was a symbol, token, or testimony, of God's presence with them. (4.) They were to expect, being told it before, that the rod of the tribe, or prince, whom God chose to the priesthood, should bud and blossom, v. 5. It was requisite that they should be told of it, that it might appear not to be casual, but according to the counsel and will of God.

II. The preparing of the rods accordingly. The princes brought them in, some of them perhaps fondly expecting that the choice would fall upon them, and all of them thinking it honour enough to be competitors with Aaron, and to stand candidates, even for the priesthood (v. 7); and *Moses laid them up before the Lord*. He did not object that the matter was sufficiently settled already, and enough done to convince those that were not invincibly hardened in their prejudices. He did not undertake to determine the controversy himself, though it might easily have been done; nor did he suggest that it would be to no purpose to offer satisfaction to a people that were willingly blind. But, since God will have it so, he did his part, and lodged the case before the Lord, to whom the appeal was made by consent, and left it with him.

### **Verses 8-13**

Here is, I. The final determination of the controversy concerning the priesthood by a miracle, v. 8, 9. The rods or staves were brought out from the most holy place where they were laid up, and publicly produced before the people; and, while all the rest of the rods remained as they were, Aaron's rod only, of a dry stick, became a living branch, budded, and blossomed, and yielded almonds. In some places there were buds, in others blossoms, in others fruit, at the same time. This was miraculous, and took away all suspicion of a fraud, as if in the night Moses had taken away Aaron's rod, and put a living branch of an almond tree in the room of it; for no ordinary branch would have buds, blossoms, and fruits upon it, all at once. Now,

1. This was a plain indication to the people that Aaron was chosen to the priesthood, and not any other of the princes of the tribes. Thus he was distinguished from them and manifested to be under the special blessing of heaven, which sometimes yields increase where there is neither planting nor watering by the hand of man. Bishop Hall here observes that fruitfulness is the best evidence of a divine call, and that the plants of God's setting, and the boughs cut off from them, will flourish. See Ps. 92:12–14. The trees of the Lord, though they seem dry trees, are full of sap.

2. It was a very proper sign to represent the priesthood itself, which was hereby confirmed to Aaron. (1.) That it should be fruitful and serviceable to the church of God. It produced not only blossoms, but almonds; for the priesthood was designed, not only for an honour to Aaron, but for a blessing to Israel. Thus Christ ordained his apostles and ministers that they should go and bring forth fruit, and that their *fruit should remain*, Jn. 15:16. (2.) That there should be a succession of priests. Here were not only almonds for the present, but buds and blossoms promising more hereafter. Thus has Christ provided in his church that a seed should serve him from generation to generation. (3.) That yet this priesthood should not be perpetual, but in process of time, like the branches and blossoms of a tree, should fail and wither. The flourishing of the almond-tree is mentioned as one of the signs of old age, Eccl. 12:5. This character was betimes put upon the Mosaic priesthood, which soon became old and *ready to vanish away*, Heb. 8:13.

3. It was a type and figure of Christ and his priesthood: for he is *the man, the branch*, that is to be *a priest upon his throne*, as it

follows (Zec. 6:12); and he was to *grow up before God*, as this before the ark, *like a tender plant, and a root out of a dry ground*, Isa. 53:2.

II. The record of this determination, by the preserving of the rod before the testimony, *in perpetuam rei memoriam*—*that it might be had in perpetual remembrance*, v. 10, 11. It is probable that the buds, and blossoms, and fruit, continued fresh; the same divine power that produced them in a night preserved them for ages, at least so long as it was necessary for a token against the rebels. So it was a standing miracle, and the continuance of it was an undeniable proof of the truth of it. Even the leaf of God's trees shall not wither, Ps. 1:3. This rod was preserved, as the censers were, to *take away their murmurings, that they die not*. Note, 1. The design of God in all his providences, both mercies and judgments, and in the memorials of them, is to take away sin, and to prevent it. These things are done, these things written, *that we sin not*, 1 Jn. 2:1. Christ was *manifested to take away sin*. 2. What God does for the taking away of sin is done in real kindness to us, *that we die not*. All the bitter potions he gives, and all the sharp methods he uses with us, are for the cure of a disease which otherwise would certainly be fatal. Bishop Hall observes here that the tables of the law, the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod, were preserved together in or about the ark (the apostle takes notice of them all three together, Heb. 9:4), to show to after-ages how the ancient church was taught, and fed, and ruled; and he infers how precious the doctrine, sacraments, and government, of the church are to God and should be to us. The rod of Moses was used in working many miracles, yet we do not find that this was preserved, for the keeping of it would serve only to gratify men's curiosity; but the rod of Aaron, which carried its miracle along with it, was carefully preserved, because that would be of standing use to convince men's consciences, to silence all disputes about the priesthood, and to confirm the faith of God's Israel in his institutions. Such is the difference between the sacraments which Christ has appointed for edification and the relics which men have devised for superstition.

III. The outcry of the people hereupon (v. 12, 13): *Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Shall we be consumed with dying?* This may be considered as the language either, 1. Of a repining people quarrelling with the judgments of God, which, by their own pride and obstinacy, they had brought upon themselves. They seem to speak despairingly, as if God was a hard Master, that sought advantage against them, and took all occasions to pick quarrels with them, so that if they trod every so little awry, if they stepped ever so little beyond their bounds, they must die, they must perish, they must all perish, basely insinuating that God would never be satisfied with their blood and ruin, till he had made an end of them all and they were consumed with dying. Thus they seem to be like a *wild bull in a net, full of the fury of the Lord* (Isa. 51:20), fretting that God was too hard for them and that they were forced to submit, which they did only because they could not help it. Note, It is a very wicked thing 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 owing to ourselves, and the blame will lie upon our own heads. Or, 2. Of a repenting people. Many interpreters take it as expressing their submission: "Now we see that it is the will of God we should keep our distance, and that it is at our peril if we draw nearer than is appointed. We submit to the divine will in this appointment; we will not contend any more, lest we all perish:" and they engage Moses to intercede for them, that they may not be all consumed with dying. Thus the point was gained, and in this matter God quite took away their murmurings, and henceforward they acquiesced. Note, When God judges he will

overcome, and, one way or other, will oblige the most obstinate gainsayers to confess their folly sooner or later, and that wherein they dealt proudly he was above them. *Vicisti Galilae—O Galilaeen, thou hast conquered!*

## Chapter 18

Aaron being now fully established in the priesthood abundantly to his own satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of the people (which was the good that God brought out of the evil opposition made to him), in this chapter God gives him full instructions concerning his office or rather repeats those which he had before given him. He tells him, I. What must be his work and the care and charge committed to him, and what assistance he should have the Levites in that work (v. 1-7). II. What should be his and the Levites' wages for this work. 1. The perquisites or fees peculiar to the priests (v. 8-19). 2. The settled maintenance of the Levites (v. 20-24). III. The portion which must be paid to the priests out of the Levites' maintenance (v. 25-32). Thus every one knew what he had to do, and what he had to live upon.

### Verses 1-7

The coherence of this chapter with that foregoing is very observable.

I. The people, in the close of that chapter, had complained of the difficulty and peril that there were in drawing near to God, which put them under some dreadful apprehensions that the tabernacle in the midst of them, which they hoped would have been their joy and glory, would rather be their terror and ruin. Now, in answer to this complaint, God here gives them to understand by Aaron that the priests should come near for them as their representatives; so that, though the people were obliged to keep their distance, yet that should not at all redound to their disgrace or prejudice, but their comfortable communion with God should be kept up by the interposition of the priests.

II. A great deal of honour God had now lately put upon Aaron; his rod had budded and blossomed, when the rods of the rest of the princes remained dry, and destitute both of fruit and ornament. Now lest Aaron should be puffed up with the abundance of the favours that were done him, and the miracles that were wrought for the support of him in his high station, God comes to him to remind him of the burden that was laid upon him, and the duty required from him as a priest. He would see reason not to be proud of his preferment, but to receive the honours of his office with reverence and holy trembling, when he considered how great was the charge committed to him, and how hard it would be for him to give a good account of it. *Be not high-minded, but fear.*

1. God tells him of the danger that attended his dignity, v. 1. (1.) That both the priests and Levites (*thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house*) should *bear the iniquity of the sanctuary*; that is, if the sanctuary were profaned by the intrusion of strangers, or persons in their uncleanness, the blame should lie upon the Levites and priests, who ought to have kept them off. Though the sinner that thrust in presumptuously should die in his iniquity, yet his blood should be required at the hands of the watchmen. Or it may be taken more generally: "If any of the duties or offices of the sanctuary be neglected, if any service be not done in its season or not according to the law, if any thing be lost or misplaced in the removal of the sanctuary, you shall be accountable for it, and answer it at your peril." (2.) That the priests should themselves *bear the iniquity of the priesthood*; that is, if they either neglected any part of their work or permitted any other persons to invade their office, and take their work out of their hands, they should bear the blame of it. Note, The greater the trust is of work and power that is committed to us the

greater is our danger of contracting guilt, by falsifying and betraying that trust. This is a good reason why we should neither be envious at others' honours nor ambitious ourselves of high places, because great dignity exposes us to great iniquity. Those that are entrusted with the charge of the sanctuary will have a great deal to answer for. Who would covet the care of souls who considers the account that must be given of that care?

2. He tells him of the duty that attended his dignity. (1.) That he and his sons must *minister before the tabernacle of witness* (v. 2); that is (as bishop Patrick explains it), *before the most holy place*, in which the ark was, on the outside of the veil of that tabernacle, but within the door of the tabernacle, of the congregation. They were to attend the golden altar, the table, and candlestick, which no Levite might approach to. *You shall serve*, v. 7. Not, "You shall rule" (it was never intended that they should lord it over God's heritage), but "You shall serve God and the congregation." Note, The priesthood is a service. *If any desire the office of a bishop he desires a good work*. Ministers must remember that they are ministers, that is, servants, of whom it is required that they be humble, diligent, and faithful. (2.) That the Levites must assist him and his sons, and minister to them in all the *service of the tabernacle* (v. 2-4), though they must by no means come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary, nor at the altar meddle with the great services of burning the fat and sprinkling the blood. Aaron's family was very small, and, as it increased, the rest of the families of Israel would increase likewise, so that the hands of the priests neither were now nor were likely to be sufficient for all the service of the tabernacle; therefore (says God) *the Levites shall be joined to thee*, v. 2, and again v. 4, where there seems to be an allusion to the name of Levi, which signifies *joined*. Many of the Levites had of late set themselves against Aaron, but henceforward God promises that they should be heartily joined to him in interest and affection, and should no more contest with him. It was a good sign to Aaron that God owned him when he inclined the hearts of those concerned to own him too. The Levites are said to be given as a gift to the priests, v. 6. Note, We are to value it as a great gift of the divine bounty to have those joined to us that will be helpful and serviceable to us in the service of God. (3.) That both priests and Levites must carefully watch against the profanation of sacred things. The Levites must *keep the charge of the tabernacle*, that *no stranger* (that is, none who upon any account was forbidden to come) might *come nigh* (v. 4), and that upon pain of death, v. 7. And the priests must *keep the charge of the sanctuary* (v. 5), must instruct the people, and admonish them concerning the due distance they were to keep, and not suffer them to break the bounds set them, as Korah's company had done, that there be *no wrath any more upon the children of Israel*. Note, The preventing of sin is the preventing of wrath; and the mischief sin has done should be a warning to us for the future to watch against it both in ourselves and others.

### **Verses 8-19**

The priest's service is called a *warfare*; and who goes a warfare at his own charges? As they were well employed, so they were well provided for, and well paid. None shall serve God for nought. All believers are spiritual priests, and God has promised to take care of them; they shall *dwell in the land*, and *verily they shall be fed*, and shall not *want any good thing*. Godliness has the *promise of the life that now is*. And from this plentiful provision here made for the priests the apostle infers that it is the duty of Christian churches to maintain their ministers; those that *served at the altar lived upon the altar*. So those that preach the gospel should *live upon the gospel*, and live comfortably, 1 Co. 9:13, 14. Scandalous maintenance makes scandalous

ministers. Now observe, 1. That much of the provision that was made for them arose out of the sacrifices which they themselves were employed to offer. They had the skins of almost all the sacrifices, which they might sell, and they had a considerable share out of the meat-offerings, sin-offerings, etc. Those that had the charge of the offerings had the benefit, v. 8. Note, God's work is its own wages, and his service carries its recompence along with it. Even in keeping God's commandments there is great reward. The present pleasures of religion are part of its pay. 2. That they had not only a good table kept for them, but money likewise in their pockets for the redemption of the first-born, and those firstlings of cattle which might not be offered in sacrifice. Thus their maintenance was such as left them altogether *disentangled from the affairs of this life*; they had no grounds to occupy, no land to till, no vineyards to dress, no cattle to tend, no visible estate to take care of, and yet had a more plentiful income than any other families whatsoever. Thus God ordered it that they might be the more entirely addicted to their ministry, and not diverted from it, nor disturbed in it, by any worldly care or business (the ministry requires a whole man); and that they might be examples of living by faith, not only in God's providence, but in his ordinance. They lived from hand to mouth, that they might learn to take no thought for the morrow; sufficient for the day would be the provision thereof: and they had no estates to leave their children, that they might by faith leave their children, that they might by faith leave them to the care of that God who had *fed them all their lives long*. 3. Of the provision that was made for their tables some is said to be *most holy* (v. 9, 10), which was to be eaten by the priests themselves, and in the court of the tabernacle only; but other perquisites were less holy, of which their families might eat, at their own houses, provided they were clean, v. 11–13. See Lev. 21:10, etc. 4. It is commanded that the *best of the oil*, and the *best of the wine and wheat*, should be offered for the *first-fruits unto the Lord*, which the priest were to have, v. 12. Note, We must always serve and honour God with the best we have, for he is the best, and best deserves it; he is the first, and therefore must have the first ripe. Those that think to save charges by putting God off with the refuse do but deceive themselves, for *God is not mocked*. 5. All this is given to the priests *by reason of the anointing*, v. 8. It was not for the sake of their personal merits above other Israelites that they had these tributes paid to them, be it known unto them; but purely for the sake of the office to which they were anointed. Thus all the comforts that are given to the Lord's people are given them by reason of the anointing which they have received. It is said to be given them *by an ordinance for ever* (v. 8), and it is a *covenant of salt for ever*, v. 19. As long as the priesthood should continue this should continue to be the maintenance of it, that this lamp might not go out for want of oil to keep it burning. Thus provision is made that a gospel ministry should continue till Christ comes, by an ordinance for ever. *Lo, I am with you* (that is their maintenance and support) *always, even to the end of the world*. Thanks be to the Redeemer, it is the word which he has *commanded to a thousand generations*.

### **Verses 20-32**

Here is a further account of the provision that was made both for the Levites and for the priests, out of the country.

I. They must have *no inheritance in the land*; only cities to dwell in were afterwards allowed them, but no ground to occupy: *Thou shalt not have any part among them*, v. 20. It is repeated again v. 23, and again v. 24, *Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance*, either by purchase or descent. God would have them comfortably provided for, but would not have

their families over-rich, lest they should think themselves above that work which their wages supposed and obliged them constantly to attend upon. As Israel was a peculiar people, and not to be numbered among the nations, so Levi was a peculiar tribe, and not to be settled as the rest of the tribes, but in all respects distinguished from them. A good reason is given why they must have *no inheritance in the land*, for, says God, *I am thy part, and thy inheritance*. Note, Those that have God for their inheritance and their portion for ever ought to look with a holy contempt and indifference upon the inheritances of this world, and not covet their portion in it. "*The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him, and not depend upon any thing I have on this earth,*" Lam. 3:24. The Levites shall have no inheritance, and yet they shall live very comfortably and plentifully—to teach us that Providence has various ways of supporting those that live in a dependence upon it; the fowls reap not, and yet are fed, the lilies spin not, and yet are clothed, the Levites have no inheritance in Israel, and yet live better than any other tribe. The repetition of that caution, that *no Israelite should approach the tabernacle*, comes in suitable, though somewhat abruptly, v. 22. It seems set in opposition to that order concerning the priests and Levites that they should have *no inheritance in Israel*, to show how God dispenses his favours variously. The Levites have the honour of attending the tabernacle, which is denied the Israelites; but then the Israelites have the honour of inheritances in Canaan, which is denied the Levites; thus each is kept from either envying or despising the other, and both have reason to rejoice in their lot. The Israelites must not *come nigh the tabernacle*, but then the Levites must have *no inheritance in the land*; if ministers expect that people should keep in their sphere, and not intermeddle with sacred offices, let them keep in theirs, and not entangle themselves in secular affairs.

II. But they must both have tithes of the land. Besides the first-fruits which were appropriated to the priests, which, the Jews say, were to be a fiftieth part, or at least a sixtieth, the tithe also was appropriated. 1. The Levites had the tithes of the people's increase (v. 21): *I have given* (whose the whole is) *all the tenths in Israel*, of all the productions of the land, to *the children of Levi*, to be divided among them in just proportions, *for their service which they serve*. The Levites were the smallest tribe of the twelve, and yet, besides all other advantages, they had a tenth part of the yearly profits, without the trouble and expense of ploughing and sowing; such care did God take of those that were devoted to his service; not only that they might be well maintained, but that they might be honoured with a national acknowledgment of the good services they did to the public, and owned as God's agents and receivers; for that which was a heave-offering, or an offering lifted heavenward unto the Lord, was by him consigned to the Levites. 2. The priests had the tenths of the Levites' tithes settled upon them. The order for this Moses is directed to give to the Levites, whom God would have to pay it with cheerfulness, rather than the priests to demand it with authority: *Speak to the Levites* that it be *offered by them*, rather than levied upon them. Now observe, (1.) The Levites were to give God his dues out of their tithes, as well as the Israelites out of their increase. They were God's tenants, and rent was expected from them, nor were they exempted by their office. Thus now, ministers must be charitable out of what they receive; and the more freely they have received the more freely they must give, and be examples of liberality. *You shall offer a heave-offering to the Lord*, v. 26. Those that are employed to assist the devotions of others must be sure to pay their own, as a heave-offering to the Lord. Prayers and praises lifted up to God, or rather the heart lifted up in them, are now our heave-offerings. This (says God) shall be *reckoned to you as though it were the corn of the threshing-floor*; that is, though it was not the fruit of

their ground, nor of their own labour, as the tithes of other Israelites were, yet being of such as they had it should be accepted, to the sanctifying of all the rest. (2.) This was to be given *to Aaron the priest* (v. 28), and to his successors the high priests, to be divided and disposed of in such proportions as they should think fit among the inferior priests. Most of the profits of the priests' office, which were appointed in the former part of the chapter, arising from the sacrifices, those priests had the benefit of who constantly attended at the altar; but, forasmuch as there were many priests employed in the country to teach and rule, those tithes taken by the Levites, it is probable, were directed by the high priest for their maintenance. It is the probable conjecture of the learned bishop Patrick that the tenth of this last tenth was reserved for the high priest himself, to support his state and dignity; for otherwise we read not of any peculiar provision made for him. (3.) When the Levites had thus paid the tenth of their income, as a heave-offering to the Lord, they had themselves the comfortable enjoyment of the other nine parts (v. 30): "When you have thus *heaved the best from it* (for still God's part must be the best) then you shall *eat the rest*, not as a holy thing, but with the same freedom that the other Israelites eat their part with, *in every place, you and your households*," v. 31. See here what is the way to have the comfort of all our worldly possessions so as to bear no sin by reason of them, as it follows, v. 32. [1.] We must be sure that what we have be got honestly and in the service of God. It is *your reward for your service*; that meat is the best eating that is first earned; but, if any *will not work, neither shall he eat*, 2 Th. 3:10. And that seems to be spoken of as having a particular comfort and satisfaction in it which is the reward of faithful service done in the tabernacle of the congregation. [2.] We must be sure that God has his dues out of it. Then we have the comfort of our substance when we have honoured the Lord with it. The *you shall bear no sin by reason of it*, when *you have heaved the best from it*. This intimates that we must never feed ourselves without fear, lest our table become a snare, and we bear sin by reason of it; and that therefore we are concerned to *give alms of such things as we have*, that all may be clean and comfortable to us

## Chapter 19

This chapter is only concerning the preparing and using of the ashes which were to impregnate the water of purification. The people had complained of the strictness of the law, which forbade their near approach to the tabernacle, ch. 17:13. In answer to this complaint, they are here directed to purify themselves, so as that they might come as far as they had occasion without fear. Here is, I. The method of preparing these ashes, by the burning of a red heifer, with a great deal of ceremony (v. 1–10). II. The way of using them. 1. They were designed to purify persons from the pollution contracted by a dead body (v. 11–16). 2. They were to be put into running water (a small quantity of them), with which the person to be cleansed must be purified (v. 17–22). And that this ceremonial purification was a type and figure of the cleansing of the consciences of believers from the pollutions of sin appears by the apostle's discourse, Heb. 9:13, 14, where he compares the efficacy of the blood of Christ with the sanctifying virtue that was in "the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean."

### Verses 1-10

We have here the divine appointment concerning the solemn burning of a red heifer to ashes, and the preserving of the ashes, that of them might be made, not a beautifying, but a purifying, water, for that was the utmost the law reached to; it offered not to adorn as the gospel does, but to cleanse only. This burning of the heifer, though it was not properly a sacrifice of expiation, being not performed at the altar, yet was typical of the death and sufferings of Christ, by which he intended, not only to satisfy God's justice, but to purify and pacify our consciences, that we may have peace with God and also peace in our own bosoms, to prepare for which Christ died, not only like the bulls and goats at the altar, but like the heifer without the camp.

I. There was a great deal of care employed in the choice of the heifer that was to be burnt, much more than in the choice of any other offering, v. 2. It must not only be without blemish, typifying the spotless purity and sinless perfection of the Lord Jesus, but it must a red heifer, because of the rarity of the colour, that it might be the more remarkable: the Jews say, "If but two hairs were black or white, it was unlawful." Christ, as man, was the Son of Adam, *red earth*, and we find him red in his apparel, red with his own blood, and red with the blood of his enemies. And it must be one on which never came yoke, which was not insisted on in other sacrifices, but thus was typified the voluntary offer of the Lord Jesus, when he said, *Lo, I come*, He was bound and held with no other cords than those of his own love. This heifer was to be provided at the expense of the congregation, because they were all to have a joint interest in it; and so all believers have in Christ.

II. There was to be a great deal of ceremony in the burning of it. The care of doing it was committed to Eleazar, not to Aaron himself, because it was not fit that he should do any thing to render himself ceremonially unclean, no, not so much as *till the evening* (v. 8); yet it being an affair of great concern especially in the significancy of it, it was to be performed by him that was next to Aaron in dignity. The chief priests of that time had the principal hand in the death of Christ. Now,

1. The heifer was to be slain without the camp, as an impure thing, which bespeaks the insufficiency of the methods prescribed by the ceremonial law to take away sin. So far were they from cleansing effectually that they were themselves unclean; as if the pollution that was laid upon them continued to cleave to them. Yet, to answer this type, our Lord Jesus, being made sin and

a curse for us, *suffered without the gate*, Heb. 13:12.

2. Eleazar was to *sprinkle the blood directly before the door of the tabernacle*, and looking steadfastly towards it, v. 4. This made it in some sort an expiation; for the sprinkling of the blood before the Lord was the chief solemnity in all the sacrifices of atonement; therefore, though this was not done at the altar, yet, being done towards the sanctuary, it was intimated that the virtue and validity of it depended upon the sanctuary, and were derived from it. This signified the satisfaction that was made to God by the death of Christ, our great high priest, who *by the eternal Spirit* (and the Spirit is called the finger of God, as Ainsworth observes, Lu. 11:20) *offered himself without spot unto God*; directly before the sanctuary, when he said, *Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit*. It also signifies how necessary it was to the purifying of our hearts that satisfaction should be made to divine justice. This sprinkling of the blood put virtue into the ashes.

3. The heifer was to be *wholly burnt*, v. 5. This typified the extreme sufferings of our Lord Jesus, both in soul and body, as a sacrifice made by fire. The priest was to cast into the fire, while it was burning, cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet, which were used in the cleansing of lepers (Lev. 14:6, 7), that the ashes of these might be mingled with the ashes of the heifer, because they were designed for purification.

4. The ashes of the heifer (separated as well as they could from the ashes of the wood wherewith it was burnt) were to be carefully gathered up by the hand of a clean person, and (as the Jews say) pounded and sifted, and so laid up for the use of the congregation, as there was occasion (v. 9), not only for that generation, but for posterity; for the ashes of this one heifer were sufficient to season as many vessels of water as the people of Israel would need for many ages. The Jews say that this one served till the captivity, nearly 1000 years, and that there was never another heifer burnt till Ezra's time, after their return, to which tradition of theirs, grounded (I suppose) only upon the silence of their old records, I see no reason we have to give credit, since in the later times of their church, of which they had more full records, they find eight burnt between Ezra's time and the destruction of the second temple, which was about 500 years, These ashes are said to be laid up here as *a purification for sin*, because, though they were intended to purify only from ceremonial uncleanness, yet they were a type of that purification for sin which our Lord Jesus made by his death. Ashes mixed with water are used in scouring, but these had their virtue purely from the divine institution, and their accomplishment and perfection in Christ, who is *the end of this law for righteousness*. Now observe, (1.) That the water of purification was made so by the ashes of a heifer, whose blood was sprinkled before the sanctuary; so that which cleanses our consciences is the abiding virtue of the death of Christ; it is his blood that *cleanses from all sin*, 1 Jn. 1:7. (2.) That the ashes were sufficient for all the people. There needed not to be a fresh heifer slain for every person or family that had occasion to be purified, but this one was enough for all, even for the strangers that sojourned among them (v. 10); so there is virtue enough in the blood of Christ for all that repent and believe the gospel, for every Israelite, and not for their sins only, but for *the sins of the whole world*, 1 Jn. 2:2. (3.) That these ashes were capable of being preserved without waste to many ages. No bodily substance is so incorruptible as ashes are, which (says bishop Patrick) made these a very fit emblem of the everlasting efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. He is able to save, and, in order to that, able to cleanse, to the uttermost, both of person and times. (4.) These ashes were laid up as a stock or treasure, for the constant

purification of Israel from their pollutions; so the blood of Christ is laid up for us in the word and sacraments, as an inexhaustible fountain of merit, to which by faith we may have recourse daily for the purging of our consciences; see Zec. 13:1.

5. All those that were employed in this service were made ceremonially unclean by it; even Eleazar himself, though he did but sprinkle the blood, v. 7. *He that burned the heifer was unclean* (v. 8), and he that *gathered up the ashes* (v. 10); so all that had a hand in putting Christ to death contracted guilt by it: his betrayer, his prosecutors, his judge, his executioner, all did what they did with wicked hands, though it was *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God* (Acts 2:23); yet some of them were, and all might have been cleansed by the virtue of that same blood which they had brought themselves under the guilt of. Some make this to signify the imperfection of the legal services, and their insufficiency to take away sin, inasmuch as those who prepared for the purifying of others were themselves polluted by the preparation. The Jews say, This is a mystery which Solomon himself did not understand, that the same thing should pollute those that were clean and purify those that were unclean. But (says bishop Patrick) it is not strange to those who consider that all the sacrifices which were offered for sin were therefore looked upon as impure, because the sins of men were laid upon them, as all our sins were upon Christ, who therefore is said to be *made sin for us*, 2 Co. 5:21.

#### **Verses 11-22**

Directions are here given concerning the use and application of the ashes which were prepared for purification. they were laid up to be laid out; and therefore, though now one place would serve to keep them in, while all Israel lay so closely encamped, yet it is probable that afterwards, when they came to Canaan, some of these ashes were kept in every town, for there would be daily use for them. Observe,

I. In what cases there needed a purification with these ashes. No other is mentioned here than the ceremonial uncleanness that was contracted by the touch of a dead body, or of the bone or grave of a dead man, or being in the tent or house where a dead body lay, v. 11, 14–16. This I look upon to have been one of the greatest burdens of the ceremonial law, and one of the most unaccountable. He that touched the carcase of an unclean beast, or any living man under the greatest ceremonial uncleanness, was made unclean by it only *till the evening*, and needed only common water to purify himself with; but he that came near the dead body of man, woman, or child, much bear the reproach of his uncleanness seven days, must twice be purified with the water of separation, which he could not obtain without trouble and charge, and till he was purified must not come near the sanctuary upon pain of death.

1. This was strange, considering, (1.) that whenever any died (and we are in deaths oft) several persons must unavoidable contract this pollution, the body must be stripped, washed, wound up, carried out, and buried, and this could not be done without many hands, and yet all defiled, which signifies that in our corrupt and fallen state there is none that lives and sins not; we cannot avoid being polluted by the defiling world we pass through, and we offend daily, yet the impossibility of our being sinless does not make sin the less polluting. (2.) that taking care of the dead, to see them decently buried, is not only necessary, but a very good office, and an act of kindness, both to the honour of the dead and the comfort of the living, and yet uncleanness

was contracted by it, which intimates that the pollutions of sin mix with and cleave to our best services. *There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*; we are apt some way or other to do amiss even in our doing good. (3.) That this pollution was contracted by what was done privately in their own houses, which intimates (as bishop Patrick observes) that God sees what is done in secret, and nothing can be concealed from the divine Majesty. (4.) This pollution might be contracted, and yet a man might never know it, as by the touch of a grave which appeared not, of which our Saviour says, Those that *walk over it are not aware of it* (Lu. 11:44), which intimates the defilement of the conscience by sins of ignorance, and the cause we have to cry out, "Who can understand his errors?" and to pray, "Cleanse us from secret faults, faults which we ourselves do not see ourselves guilty of."

2. But why did the law make a dead corpse such a defiling thing? (1.) Because death is the *wages of sin, entered into the world* by it, and reigns by the power of it. Death to mankind is another thing from what it is to other creatures: it is a curse, it is the execution of the law, and therefore the defilement of death signifies the defilement of sin. (2.) Because the law could not conquer death, nor abolish it and alter the property of it, as the gospel does by bringing life and immortality to light, and so introducing a better hope. Since our Redeemer was dead and buried, death is no more destroying to the Israel of God, and therefore dead bodies are no more defiling; but while the church was under the law, to show that it *made not the comers thereunto perfect*, the pollution contracted by dead bodies could not but form in their minds melancholy and uncomfortable notions concerning death, while believers now through Christ can triumph over it. *O grave! where is thy victory?* Where is thy pollution?

II. How the ashes were to be used and applied in these cases. 1. A small quantity of the ashes must be put into a cup of spring water, and mixed with the water, which thereby was made, as it is here called, a *water of separation*, because it was to be sprinkled on those who were separated or removed from the sanctuary by their uncleanness. 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 operation that the righteousness of Christ is applied to us for our cleansing. Hence we are said to be washed, that is, sanctified and justified, not only in the name of the Lord Jesus, but by the *Spirit of our God*, 1 Co. 6:11; 1 Pt. 1:2. Those that promise themselves benefit by the righteousness of Christ, while they submit not to the grace and influence of the Spirit, do but deceive themselves, for we cannot put asunder what God has joined, nor be purified by the ashes otherwise than in the running water. 2. This water must be applied by a bunch of hyssop dipped in it, with which the person or thing to be cleansed must be sprinkled (v. 18), in allusion to which David prays, *Purge me with hyssop*. Faith is the bunch of hyssop wherewith the conscience is sprinkled and the heart purified. Many might be sprinkled at once, and the water with which the ashes were mingled might serve for many sprinklings, till it was all spent; and a very little lighting upon a man served to purify him, if done with that intention. In allusion to this application of the water of separation by sprinkling, the blood of Christ is said to be the *blood of sprinkling* (Heb. 12:24), and with it were we said to be *sprinkled from an evil conscience* (Heb. 10:22), that is, we are freed from the uneasiness that arises from a sense of our guilt. And it is foretold that Christ, by his baptism, shall *sprinkle many nations*, Isa. 52:15. 3. The unclean person must be sprinkled with this water on *the third day* after his pollution,

and *on the seventh day*, v. 12–19. The days were reckoned (we may suppose) from the last time of his touching or coming near the dead body; for he would not begin the days of his cleansing while he was still under a necessity of repeating the pollution; but when the dead body was buried, so that there was no further occasion of meddling with it, then he began to reckon his days. Then, and then only, we may with comfort apply Christ's merit to our souls, when we have forsaken sin, and cease all *fellowship with the unfruitful works of death and darkness*. The repetition of the sprinkling teaches us often to renew the actings of repentance and faith, wash as Naaman, *seven times*; we need to do that often which is so necessary to be well done.

4. Though the pollution contracted was only ceremonial, yet the neglect of the purification prescribed would turn into moral guilt: *He that shall be unclean and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off*, v. 20. Note, It is a dangerous thing to contemn divine institutions, though they may seem minute. A slight wound, if neglected, may prove fatal; a sin we call little, if not repented of, will be our ruin, when great sinners that repent shall find mercy. Our uncleanness separates us from God, but it is our being unclean and not purifying ourselves that will separate us for ever from him: it is not the wound that is fatal, so much as the contempt of the remedy.

5. Even he that *sprinkled the water of separation*, or *touched it*, or *touched the unclean person*, must be *unclean till the evening*, that is, must not come near the sanctuary on that day, v. 21, 22. Thus God would show them the imperfection of those services, and their insufficiency to purify the conscience, that they might look for the Messiah, who in the fulness of time should by the eternal Spirit offer himself without spot unto God, and so *purge our consciences from dead works* (that is, from sin, which defiles like a dead body, and is therefore called a *body of death*), that we may have liberty of access to the sanctuary, to serve the living God with living sacrifices.

## Chapter 20

At this chapter begins the history of the fortieth year (which was the last year) of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness. And since the beginning of their second year, when they were sentenced to perform their quarantine in the desert, there to wear away the tedious revolution of forty years, there is little recorded concerning them till this last year, which brought them to the borders of Canaan, and the history of this year is almost as large as the history of the first year. This chapter gives an account of, I. The death of Miriam (v. 1). II. The fetching of water out of the rock, in which observe, 1. The distress Israel was in, for want of water (v. 2). 2. Their discontent and murmuring in that distress (v. 3-5). 3. God's pity and power engaged for their supply with water out of the rock (v. 6-9). 4. The infirmity of Moses and Aaron upon this occasion (v. 10, 11). 5. God's displeasure against them (v. 12, 13). III. The negotiation with the Edomites. Israel's request (v. 14-17), and the repulse the Edomites gave them (v. 18-21). IV. The death of Aaron the high priest upon Mount Hor, the instalment of Eleazar in his room, and the people's mourning for him (v. 22, etc.).

### Verses 1-13

After thirty-eight years' tedious marches, or rather tedious rests, in the wilderness, backward towards the Red Sea, the armies of Israel now at length set their faces towards Canaan again, and had come not far off from the place where they were when, by the righteous sentence of divine Justice, they were made to begin their wanderings. Hitherto they had been led about as in a maze or labyrinth, while execution was doing upon the rebels that were sentenced; but they were now brought into the right way again: they abode in Kadesh (v. 1), not Kadesh-barnea, which was near the borders of Canaan, but another Kadesh on the confines of Edom, further off from the land of promise, yet in the way to it from the Red Sea, to which they had been hurried back. Now,

I. Here dies Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, and as it should seem older than either of them. She must have been so if she was that sister that was set to watch Moses when he was put into the ark of bulrushes, Ex. 2:4. *Miriam died there*, v. 1. She was a prophetess, and had been an instrument of much good to Israel, Mic. 6:4. When Moses and Aaron with their rod went before them, to work wonders for them, Miriam with her timbrel went before them in praising God for these wondrous works (Ex. 15:20), and therein did them real service; yet she had once been a murmurer (ch. 12:1), and must not enter Canaan.

II. Here there is another Meribah. one place we met with before of that name, in the beginning of their march through the wilderness, which was so called *because of the chiding of the children of Israel*, Ex. 17:7. And now we have another place, at the latter end of their march, which bears the same name for the same reason: *This is the water of Meribah*, v. 13. What was there done was here re-acted.

1. *There was no water for the congregation*, v. 2. The water out of the rock of Rephidim had followed them while there was need of it; but it is probable that for some time they had been in a country where they were supplied in an ordinary way, and when common providence supplied them it was fit that the miracle should cease. But in this place it fell out that there was no water, or not sufficient for the congregation. Note, We live in a wanting world, and, wherever we are, must expect to meet with

some inconvenience or other. It is a great mercy to have plenty of water, a mercy which if we found the want of we should own the worth of.

2. Hereupon they murmured, mutinied (v. 2), *gathered themselves together*, and took up arms *against Moses and Aaron*. They chid with them (v. 3), spoke the same absurd and brutish language that their fathers had done before them. (1.) They wished they had died as malefactors by the hands of divine justice, rather than thus seem for a while neglected by the divine mercy: *Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!* Instead of giving God thanks, as they ought to have done, for sparing them, they not only despise the mercy of their reprieve, but quarrel with it, as if God had done them a great deal of wrong in giving them their lives for a prey, and snatching them as brands out of the burning. But they need not wish that they had died with their brethren, they are here taking the ready way to die like their brethren in a little while. *Woe unto those that desire the day of the Lord*, Amos 5:18. (2.) They were angry that they were brought out of Egypt, and led through this wilderness, v. 4, 5. They quarrelled with Moses for that which they knew was the Lord's doing; they represented that as an injury which was the greatest favour that ever was done to any people. They prefer slavery before liberty, the house of bondage before the land of promise; and though, the present want was of water only, yet, now that they are disposed to find fault, it shall be looked upon as an insufferable hardship put upon them that they have not vines and figs. It was an aggravation of their crime, [1.] that they had smarted so long for the discontents and distrusts of their fathers. *They had borne their whoredoms* now almost *forty years in the wilderness* (ch. 14:33); and yet they ventured in the same steps, and, as is charged upon Belshazzar, *humbled not their hearts, though they knew all this*, Dan. 5:22. [2.] That they had had such long and constant experience of God's goodness to them, and of the tenderness and faithfulness of Moses and Aaron. [3.] That Miriam was now lately dead; and, having lost one of their leaders, they ought to have been more respectful to those that were left; but, as if they were resolved to provoke God to leave them as sheep without any shepherd, they grow outrageous against them: instead of condoling with Moses and Aaron for the death of their sister, they add affliction to their grief.

3. Moses and Aaron made them no reply, but retired to the door of the tabernacle to know God's mind in this case, v. 6. There they *fell on their faces*, as formerly on the like occasion, to deprecate the wrath of God and to entreat direction from him. Here is no mention of any thing they said; they knew that God heard the murmurings of the people, and before him they humbly prostrate themselves, making intercessions with *groanings that cannot be uttered*. There they lay waiting for orders *Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear*.

4. God appeared, to determine the matter; not on his tribunal of justice, to sentence the rebels according to their deserts; no, he *will not return to destroy Ephraim* (Hosea 11:9), *will not always chide*; see Gen. 8:21. But he appeared, (1.) On his throne of glory, to silence their unjust murmuring (v. 6): *The glory of the Lord appeared, to still the tumult of the people*, by striking an awe upon them. Note, A believing sight of the glory of the Lord would be an effectual check to our lusts and passions, and would keep our mouths as with a bridle. (2.) On his throne of grace, to satisfy their just desires. It was requisite that they should have water, and therefore, thought the manner of their petitioning for it was irregular and disorderly, yet God did not take that advantage against them to deny it to them, but gave immediate orders for their supply, v. 8. Moses must a second time

in God's name command water out of a rock for them, to show that God is as able as ever to supply his people with good things, even in their greatest straits and in the utmost failure of second causes. Almighty power can bring water out of a rock, has done it, and can again, for his arm is not shortened. Lest it should be thought that there was something peculiar in the former rock itself, some secret spring which nature hid before in it, God here bids him broach another, and does not, as then, direct him which he must apply to, but lets him make use of which he pleased, or the first he came to; all alike to Omnipotence. [1.] God bids him take the rod, that famous rod with which he summoned the plagues of Egypt, and divided the sea, that, having that in his hand, both he and the people might be reminded of the great things God had formerly done for them, and might be encouraged to trust in him now. This rod, it seems, was kept in the tabernacle (v. 9), for it was the *rod of God*, the *rod of his strength*, as the gospel is called (Ps. 110:2), perhaps in allusion to it. [2.] God bids him gather the assembly, not the elders only, but the people, to be witnesses of what was done, that by their own eyes they might be convinced and made ashamed of their unbelief. There is no fallacy in God's works of wonder, and therefore they shun not the light, nor the inspection and enquiry of many witnesses. [3.] He bids him speak to the rock, which would do as it was bidden, to shame the people who had been so often spoken to, and would not hear nor obey. Their hearts were harder than this rock, not so tender, not so yielding, not so obedient. [4.] He promises that the rock should give forth water (v. 8), and it did so (v. 11): *The water came out abundantly*. This is an instance, not only of the power of God, that he could thus fetch *honey out of the rock*, and *oil out of the flinty rock*, but of his mercy and grace, that he would do it for such a provoking people. This was a new generation (most of the old stock were by this time worn off), yet they were as bad as those that went before them; murmuring ran in the blood, yet the entail of the divine favour was not cut off, but in this instance of it the divine patience shines as brightly as the divine power. He is God and not man, in sparing and pardoning; nay, he not only here gave them the drink which they drank of in common with their beasts (v. 8, 11), but in it he made them to drink spiritual drink, which typified spiritual blessings, *for that rock was Christ*.

5. Moses and Aaron acted improperly in the management of this matter, so much so that God in displeasure told them immediately that they should not have the honour of bringing Israel into Canaan, v. 10–12.

(1.) This is a strange passage of story, yet very instructive. [1.] It is certain that God was greatly offended, and justly, for he is never angry without cause. Though they were his servants, and had obtained mercy to be faithful, though they were his favourites, and such as he had highly honoured, yet for something they thought, or said, or did, upon this occasion, he put them under the disgrace and mortification of dying, as other unbelieving Israelites did, short of Canaan. And no doubt the crime deserved the punishment. [2.] Yet it is uncertain what it was in this management that was so provoking to God. The fault was complicated. *First*, They did not punctually observe their orders, but in some things varied from their commission; God bade them *speak to the rock*, and they spoke *to the people*, and *smote the rock*, which at this time they were not ordered to do, but they thought speaking would not do. When, in distrust of the power of the word, we have recourse to the secular power in matters of pure conscience, we do, as Moses here, smite the rock to which we should only speak, *Secondly*, They assumed too 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 theirs. Therefore it is charged upon them (v. 12) that *they did not sanctify God*, that is, they did not give him that glory of this miracle which was due unto his name. *Thirdly*, Unbelief was the great transgression (v. 12): *You believed me not*; nay, it is called *rebellious against God's commandment*, ch. 27:14. The command was to bring water out of the rock, but they rebelled against this command, by distrusting it, and doubting whether it would take effect or no. They speak doubtfully: *Must we fetch water?* And probably they did in some other ways discover an uncertainty in their own minds whether water would come or no for such a rebellious generation as this was. And perhaps they the rather questioned it, though God had promised it, because the glory of the Lord did not appear before them upon this rock, as it had done upon the rock in Rephidim, Ex. 17:6. They would not take God's word without a sign. Dr. Lightfoot's notion of their unbelief is that they doubted whether now at last, when the forty years had expired, they should enter Canaan, and whether they must not for the murmurings of the people be condemned to another period of toil, because a new rock was now opened for their supply, which they took for an indication of their longer stay. And, if so, justly were they kept out of Canaan themselves, while the people entered at the time appointed. *Fourthly*, They said and did all in heat and passion; this is the account given of the sin (Ps. 106:33): *They provoked his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips*. It was in his passion that he called them *rebels*. It is true they were so; God had called them so; and Moses afterwards, in the way of a just reproof (Deu. 9:24), calls them so without offence; but now it came from a provoked spirit, and was spoken unadvisedly: it was too much like *Raca*, and *Thou fool*. His smiting the rock twice (it should seem, not waiting at all for the eruption of the water upon the first stroke) shows that he was in a heat. The same thing said and done with meekness may be justifiable which when said and done in anger may be highly culpable; see Jam. 1:20. *Fifthly*, That which aggravated all the rest, and made it the more provoking, was that it was public, *before the eyes of the children of Israel*, to whom they should have been examples of faith, and hope, and meekness. We find Moses guilty of sinful distrust, ch. 11:22, 23. That was private between God and him, and therefore was only checked. But his was public; it dishonoured God before Israel, as if he grudged them his favours, and discouraged the people's hope in God, and therefore this was severely punished, and the more because of the dignity and eminency of those that offended.

(2.) From the whole we may learn, [1.] That the best of men have their failings, even in those graces that they are most eminent for. The man Moses was very meek, and yet here he sinned in passion; wherefore *let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*. [2.] That God judges not as man judges concerning sins; we might think that there was not much amiss in what Moses said and did, yet God saw cause to animadvert severely upon it. He knows the frame of men's spirits, what temper they are of, and what temper they are in upon particular occasions, and from what thoughts and intents words and actions do proceed; and we are sure that therefore *his judgment is according to truth*, when it agrees not with ours. [3.] that God not only takes notice of, and is displeased with, the sins of his people, but that the nearer any are to him the more offensive are their sins, Amos 3:2. It should seem, the Psalmist refers to this sin of Moses and Aaron (Ps. 99:8): *Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance on their inventions*. As many are spared in this life and punished in the other, so many are punished in this life and saved in the other. [4.] That, when our heart is hot within us, we are concerned to take heed that we offend not with our tongue. Yet, [5.] It is an evidence of the sincerity of Moses, and his impartiality in writing, that he himself left this upon record

concerning himself, and drew not a veil over his own infirmity, by which it appeared that in what he wrote, as well as what he did, he sought God's glory more than his own.

*Lastly*, The place is hereupon called *Meribah*, v. 13. It is called *Meribah-Kadesh* (Deu. 32:51), to distinguish it from the other Meribah. It is the *water of strife*; to perpetuate the remembrance of the people's sin, and Moses's, and yet of God's mercy, who supplied them with water, and owned and honoured Moses notwithstanding. Thus he was sanctified in the, as the *Holy One of Israel*, so he is called when his mercy rejoices against judgment, Hos. 11:9. Moses and Aaron did not sanctify God as they ought in the eyes of Israel (v. 12), but God was sanctified in them; for he will not be a loser in his honour by any man. If he be not glorified by us, he will be glorified upon us.

### **Verses 14-21**

We have here the application made by Israel to the Edomites. The nearest way to Canaan from the place where Israel now lay encamped was through the country of Edom. Now,

I. Moses sends ambassadors to treat with the king of Edom for leave to pass through his country, and gives them instructions what to say, v. 14–17. 1. They are to claim kindred with the Edomites: *Thus saith thy brother Israel*. Both nations descended from Abraham and Isaac, their common ancestors; Esau and Jacob, the two fathers of their respective nations, were twin-brothers; and therefore, for relation-sake, they might reasonably expect this kindness from them; nor needed the Edomites to fear that their brother Israel had any ill design upon them, or would take any advantages against them. 2. They are to give a short account of the history and present state of Israel, which, they take it for granted, the Edomites were no strangers to. And in this there was a double plea:—(1.) Israel had been abused by the Egyptians, and therefore ought to be pitied and succoured by their relations: *"The Egyptians vexed us and our fathers*, but we may hope our brethren the Edomites will not be so vexatious." (2.) Israel had been wonderfully saved by the Lord, and therefore ought to be countenanced and favoured (v. 16): *"We cried unto the Lord, and he sent an angel*, the angel of his presence, the angel of the covenant, the eternal Word, who had *brought us forth out of Egypt*, and led us hither." It was therefore the interest of the Edomites to ingratiate themselves with a people that had so great an interest in heaven and were so much its favourites, and it was at their peril if they offered them any injury. It is our wisdom and duty to be kind to those whom God is pleased to own, and to take his people for our people. *Come in, thou blessed of the Lord*. 3. They are humbly to beg a passport through their country. Though God himself, in the pillar of cloud and fire, was Israel's guide, in following which they might have justified their passing through any man's ground against all the world, yet God would have this respect paid to the Edomites, to show that no man's property ought to be invaded under colour of religion. Dominion is founded in providence, not in grace. Thus when Christ was to pass through a village of the Samaritans, to whom his coming was likely to be offensive, he *sent messengers before his face* to ask leave, Lu. 9:52. Those that would receive kindness must not disdain to request it. 4. They are to give security for the good behaviour of the Israelites in this march, that they would keep in the king's high road, that they would commit no trespass upon any man's property, either in ground or water, that they would not so much as make use of a well without paying for it, and that they would make all convenient speed, as fast as they could well go on their feet, v. 17, 19. Nothing could be offered more fair and neighbourly.

II. The ambassadors returned with a denial, v. 18. Edom, that is, the king of Edom, as protector of his country, said, *Thou shalt not pass by me*; and, when the ambassadors urged it further, he repeated the denial (v. 20) and threatened, if they offered to enter his country, it should be at their peril; he raised his trained bands to oppose them. *Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage*. This was owing, 1. To their jealousy of the Israelites; they feared they should receive promises. And truly, had this numerous army been under any other discipline and command than that of the righteous God himself, who would no more suffer them to do wrong than to take wrong, there might have been cause for this jealousy; but what could they fear from a nation that had *statutes and judgments so righteous*? 2. It was owing to the old enmity which Esau bore to Israel. If they had no reason to fear damage by them, yet they were not willing to show so much kindness to them. Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing, and now the hatred revived, when the blessing was ready to be inherited. God would hereby discover the ill-nature of the Edomites to their shame, and try the good-nature of the Israelites to their honour: they *turned away from him*, and did not take this occasion to quarrel with him. Note, We must not think it strange if the most reasonable requests be denied by unreasonable men, and if those be affronted by men whom God favours. *I as a deaf man heard not*. After this indignity which the Edomites offered to Israel God gave them a particular caution *not to abhor an Edomite* (Deu. 23:7), though the Edomites had shown such an abhorrence of them, to teach us in such cases not to meditate revenge.

### **Verses 22-29**

The chapter began with the funeral of Miriam, and it ends with the funeral of her brother Aaron. When death comes into a family, it often strikes double. Israel had not improved the former affliction they were under, by the death of the prophetess, and therefore, soon after, God took away their priest, to try if they would lay that to heart. This happened at the very next stage, when they removed to Mount Hor, fetching a compass round the Edomites' country, leaving it on their left hand.

Wherever we go, death attends us, and the graves are ready for us.

I. God bids Aaron die, v. 24. God takes Moses and Aaron aside, and tells them, *Aaron shall be gathered to his people*. These two dear brothers are told that they must part. Aaron the elder must die first, but Moses is not likely to be long after him; so that it is but for a while, a little while, that they are parted. 1. 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. The mention of this, no doubt, went to the heart of Moses, who knew himself, perhaps, at that time, to be the guiltier of the two. 2. There is much of mercy in them. Aaron, though he dies for his transgression, is not put to death as a malefactor, by a plague, or fire from heaven, but dies with ease and in honour. He is not *cut off from his people*, as the expression usually is concerning those that die by the hand of divine justice, but he is *gathered to his people*, as one that died in the arms of divine grace. 3. There is much of type and significancy in them. Aaron must not enter Canaan, to show that the Levitical priesthood could make nothing perfect: that must be done by the bringing in of a better hope. Those priests could not continue by reason of sin and death, but the priesthood of Christ, being undefiled, is unchangeable, and to this, which abides for ever, Aaron must resign all his honour, Heb. 7:23–25.

II. Aaron submits, and dies in the method and manner appointed, and, for aught that appears, with as much cheerfulness as if he had been going to bed.

1. He puts on his holy garments to take his leave of them, and goes up with his brother and son to the top of Mount Hor, and probably some of the elders of Israel with him, v. 27. They went up *in the sight of all the congregation*, who, it is likely, were told on what errand they went up; by this solemn procession Aaron lets Israel know that he is neither afraid nor ashamed to die, but, when the bridegroom comes, can trim his lamp and go forth to meet him. His going up the hill to die signified that the death of saints (and Aaron is called *the saint of the Lord*) is their ascension; they rather go up than go down to death.
2. Moses, whose hands had first clothed Aaron with his priestly garments, now strips him of them; for, in reverence to the priesthood, it was not fit that he should die in them. Note, Death will strip us; naked we came into the world, and naked we must go out. We shall see little reason to be proud of our clothes, our ornaments, or marks of honour, if we consider how soon death will strip us of our glory, divest us of all our offices and honours, and take the crown off from our head.
3. Moses immediately puts the priestly garments upon Eleazar his son, clothes him with his father's robe, and *strengthens him with his girdle*, Isa. 22:21. Now, (1.) This was a great comfort to Moses, by whose hand the law of the priesthood was given to see that it should be kept up in a succession, and that a lamp was ordained for the anointed, which should not be extinguished by death itself. This was a happy earnest and indication to the church of the care God would take that as one generation of ministers and Christians (spiritual priests) passes away another generation should come up instead of it. (2.) It was a great satisfaction to Aaron to see his son, who was dear to him, thus preferred, and his office, which was dearer, thus preserved and secured, and especially to see in this a figure of Christ's everlasting priesthood, in which alone his would be perpetuated. Now, Lord, might Aaron say, *let thy servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation*. (3.) It was a great kindness to the people. The installing of Eleazar before Aaron was dead would prevent those who bore ill-will to Aaron's family from attempting to set up another upon his death, in competition with his son. What could they do when the matter was already settled? It would likewise encourage those among them that feared God, and be a token for good to them, that he would not leave them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.
4. *Aaron died there*. Quickly after he was stripped of his priestly garments, he laid himself down and died contentedly; for 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 God and our generation some service in it?
5. Moses and Eleazar, with those that attended them, buried Aaron where he died, as appears by Deu. 10:6, and then *came down from the mount*. And now, when they came down, and had left Aaron behind, it might be proper for them to think that he had rather gone up to the better world and had left them behind.
6. All the congregation *mourned for Aaron thirty days*, v. 29. Though the loss was well made up in Eleazar, who, being in the prime of life, was fitter from public service than Aaron would have been if he had lived, yet it was a debt owing to their deceased high priest to mourn for him. While he lived, they were murmuring at him upon all occasions, but now that he was dead they mourned for him. Thus many are taught to lament the loss of those mercies which they would not learn to be thankful for the enjoyment of. Many good men have had more honour done to their memories than ever they had to their persons, witness those that were persecuted while they lived, but when they were dead had their sepulchres garnished.



## Chapter 21

The armies of Israel now begin to emerge out of the wilderness, and to come into a land inhabited, to enter upon action, and take possession of the frontiers of the land of promise. A glorious campaign this chapter gives us the history of, especially in the latter part of it. Here is, I. The defeat of Arad the Canaanite (v. 1-3). II. The chastisement of the people with fiery serpents for their murmurings, and the relief granted them upon their submission by a brazen serpent (v. 4-9). III. Several marches forward, and some occurrences by the way (v. 10-20). IV. The celebrated conquest of Sihon king of the Amorites (v. 21-32), and of Og king of Bashan (v. 33-35), and possession taken of their land.

### Verses 1-3

Here is, 1. The descent which Arad the Canaanite made upon the camp of Israel, hearing that they came *by the way of the spies*; for, though the spies which Moses had sent thirty-eight years before then passed and repassed unobserved, yet their coming, and their errand, it is likely, were afterwards known to the Canaanites, gave them an alarm, and induced them to keep an eye upon Israel and get intelligence of all their motions. Now, when they understood that they were facing about towards Canaan, this Arad, thinking it policy to keep the war at a distance, made an onset upon them and fought with them. But it proved that he meddled to his own hurt; had he sat still, his people might have been last destroyed of all the Canaanites, but now they were the first. Thus those that are *overmuch wicked die before their time*, Eccl. 7:17. 2. His success at first in this attempt. His advance-guards picked up some straggling Israelites, and took them prisoners, v. 1. This, no doubt, puffed him up, and he began to thin that he should have the honour of crushing this formidable body, and saving his country from the ruin which it threatened. It was likewise a trial to the faith of the Israelites and a check to them for their distrusts and discontents. 3. Israel's humble address to God upon this occasion, v. 2. It was a temptation to them to murmur as their fathers did, and to despair of getting possession of Canaan; but God, who thus tried them by his providence, enabled them by his grace to quit themselves well in the trial, and to trust in him for relief against this fierce and powerful assailant. They, by their elders, in prayer for success, *vowed a vow*. Noe, When we are desiring and expecting mercy from God we should bind our souls with a bond that we will faithfully do our duty to him, particularly that we will honour him with the mercy we are in the pursuit of. Thus Israel here promised to destroy the cities of these Canaanites, as devoted to God, and not to take the spoil of them to their own use. If God would give them victory, he should have all the praise, and they would not make a gain of it to themselves. When we are in this frame we are prepared to receive mercy. 4. The victory which the Israelites obtained over the Canaanites, v. 3. A strong party was sent out, probably under the command of Joshua, which not only drove back these Canaanites, but followed them to their cities, which probably lay on the edge of the wilderness, and utterly destroyed them, and so returned to the camp. *Vincimur in praelie, sed non in bello—We lose a battle, but we finally triumph*. What is said of the tribe of God is true of all God's Israel, a troop may overcome them, but they shall overcome at the last. The place was called *Hormah*, as a memorial of the destruction, for the terror of the Canaanites, and probably for warning to posterity not to attempt the rebuilding of these cities, which were destroyed as devoted to God and sacrifices to divine justice. And it appears from the instance of

Jericho that the law concerning such cities was that they should never be rebuilt. There seems to be an allusion to this name in the prophecy of the fall of the New Testament Babylon (Rev. 16:16), where its forces are said to be gathered together to a place called *Armageddon—the destruction of a troop*.

### Verses 4-9

I. The fatigue of Israel by a long march round the land of Edom, because they could not obtain passage through it the nearest way: *The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way*, v. 4. Perhaps the way was rough and uneven, or foul and dirty; or it fretted them to go far about, and that they were not permitted to force their passage through the Edomites' country. Those that are of a fretful discontented spirit will always find something or other to make them uneasy.

II. Their unbelief and murmuring upon this occasion, v. 5. Though they had just now obtained a glorious victory over the Canaanites, and were going on conquering and to conquer, yet they speak very discontentedly of what God had done for them and distrustfully of what he would do, vexed that they were brought out of Egypt, that they had not bread and water as other people had by their own care and industry, but by miracle, they knew not how. They have *bread enough and to spare*; and yet they complain *there is no bread*, because, though they eat angels' food, yet they are weary of it; manna itself is loathed, and called *light bread*, fit for children, not for men and soldiers. What will those be pleased with whom manna will not please? Those that are disposed to quarrel will find fault where there is no fault to be found. Thus those who have long enjoyed the means of grace are apt to surfeit even on the heavenly manna, and to call it light bread. But let not the contempt which some cast upon the word of God cause us to value it the less: it is the bread of life, substantial bread, and will nourish those who by faith feed upon it to eternal life, whoever calls it light bread.

III. The righteous judgment which God brought upon them for their murmuring, v. 6. He sent *fiery serpents among them*, which bit or stung many of them to death. The wilderness through which they had passed was all along infested with those fiery serpents, as appears, Deu. 8:15. but hitherto God had wonderfully preserved his people from receiving hurt by them, till now that they murmured, to chastise them for which these animals, which hitherto had shunned their camp, now invade it. Justly are those made to feel God's judgments that are not thankful for his mercies. These serpents are called *fiery*, from their colour, or from their rage, or from the effects of their bitings, inflaming the body, putting it immediately into a high fever, scorching it with an insatiable thirst. They had unjustly complained for want of water (v. 5), to chastise them for which God sends upon them this thirst, which no water would quench. Those that cry without cause have justly cause given them to cry out. They distrustfully concluded that they must *die in the wilderness*, and God took them at their word, chose their delusions, and brought their unbelieving fears upon them; many of them did die. They had impudently flown in the face of God himself, and the *poison of asps was under their lips*, and now these fiery serpents (which, it should seem, were flying serpents, Isa. 14:29) flew in their faces and poisoned them. They in their pride had lifted themselves up against God and Moses, and now God humbled and mortified them, by making these despicable animals a plague to them. That artillery is now turned against them which had formerly been made use of in their defence against the Egyptians. He that brought quails to feast them let them know that he could bring serpents to bite them; the whole creation is at war with those that are in arms against God.

IV. Their repentance and supplication to God under this judgment, v. 7. They confess their fault: *We have sinned*. They are particular in their confession: *We have spoken against the Lord, and against thee*. 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; *when he slew them, then they sought him*. They beg the prayers of Moses for them, as conscious to themselves of their own unworthiness to be heard, and convinced of the great interest which Moses had in heaven. How soon is their tone altered! Those who had just before quarrelled with him as their worst enemy now make their court to him as their best friend, and choose him for their advocate with God. Afflictions often change men's sentiments concerning God's people, and teach them to value those prayers which, at a former period, they had scorned. Moses, to show that he had heartily forgiven them, blesses those who had cursed him, and *prays for those who had despitefully used him*. Herein he was a type of Christ, who interceded for his persecutors, and a pattern to us to go and do likewise, and thus to show that *we love our enemies*.

V. The wonderful provision which God made for their relief. He did not employ Moses in summoning the judgment, but, that he might recommend him to the good affection of the people, he made him instrumental in their relief, v. 8, 9. God ordered Moses to make the representation of a fiery serpent, which he did, in brass, and set it up on a very long pole, so that it might be seen from all parts of the camp, and every one that was stung with a fiery serpent was healed by looking up to this serpent of brass. The people prayed that God would *take away the serpents from them* (v. 7), but God saw fit not to do this: for he gives effectual relief in the best way, though not in our way. Thus those who did not die for their murmuring were yet made to smart for it, that they might the more feelingly repent and humble themselves for it; they were likewise made to receive their cure from God, by the hand of Moses, that they might be taught, if possible, never again to speak against God and Moses. This method of cure was altogether miraculous, and the more wonderful if what some naturalists say be true, that looking upon bright and burnished brass is hurtful to those that are stung with fiery serpents. God can bring about his purposes by contrary means. The Jews themselves say that it was not the sight of the brazen serpent that cured them, but, in looking up to it, they looked up to God as the Lord that healed them. But there was much of gospel in this appointment. Our Saviour has told us so (Jn. 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*. Observe then a resemblance,

1. Between their disease and ours. The devil is the old serpent, a fiery serpent, hence he appears (Rev. 12:3) as a *great red dragon*. Sin is the biting of this fiery serpent; it is painful to the startled conscience, and poisonous to the seared conscience. Satan's temptations are called his *fiery darts*, Eph. 6:16. Lust and passion inflame the soul, so do the terrors of the Almighty, when they *set themselves in array*. At the last, *sin bites like a serpent and stings like an adder*; and even its sweets are turned into the gall of asps.

2. Between their remedy and ours. (1.) It was God himself that devised and prescribed this antidote against the fiery serpents; so our salvation by Christ was the contrivance of Infinite Wisdom; God himself has found the ransom. (2.) It was a very unlikely method of cure; so our salvation by the death of Christ is *to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness*. It was Moses that *lifted up the serpent in the wilderness*, so the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and Moses wrote of

him, John v. 4-6. Christ was lifted up by the rulers of the Jews, who were the successors of Moses. (3.) That which cured was shaped in the likeness of that which wounded. So Christ, though perfectly free from sin himself, yet was *made in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom. 8:3), so like that it was taken for granted that this man was a sinner, Jn. 9:24. (4.) The brazen serpent was lifted up; so was Christ. He was lifted up upon the cross (Jn. 12:33, 34), for his was made a spectacle to the world. He was lifted up by the preaching of the gospel. The word here used for a *pole* signifies a *banner*, or *ensign*, for Christ crucified *stands for an ensign of the people*, Isa. 11:10. Some make the lifting up of the serpent to be a figure of Christ's triumphing over Satan, the old serpent, whose head he bruised, when in his cross he made an open show of the principalities and powers which he had spoiled and destroyed, Col. 2:15.

3. Between 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, Heb. 12:2. *Look unto me, and be you saved*, Isa. 45:22. We must be sensible of our wound and of our danger by it, receive the record which God has given concerning his Son, and rely upon the assurance he has given us that we shall be healed and saved by him if we resign ourselves to his direction. The brazen serpent's being lifted up would not cure if it was not looked upon. If any pored on their wound, and would not look up to the brazen serpent, they inevitably died. If they slighted this method of cure, and had recourse to natural medicines, and trusted to them, they justly perished; so if sinners either despise Christ's righteousness or despair of benefit by it their wound will, without doubt, be fatal. But whoever looked up to this healing sign, though from the outmost part of the camp, though with a weak and weeping eye, was certainly healed; so whosoever believes in Christ, though as yet but weak in faith, shall not perish. There are weak brethren *for whom Christ died*. Perhaps for some time after the serpent was set up the camp of Israel was molested by the fiery serpents; and it is the probable conjecture of some that they carried this brazen serpent along with them through the rest of their journey, and set it up wherever they encamped, and, when they settled in Canaan, fixed it somewhere within the borders of the land; for it is not likely that the children of Israel went so far off as this was into the wilderness to burn incense to it, as we find they did, 2 Ki. 18:4. Even those that are delivered from the eternal death which is the wages of sin must expect to feel the pain and smart of it as long as they are here in this world; but, if it be not our own fault, we may have the brazen serpent to accompany us, to be still looked up to upon all occasions, by bearing about with us continually the dying of the Lord Jesus.

### **Verses 10-20**

We have here an account of the several stages and removals of the children of Israel, till they came into the plains of Moab, out of which they at length passed over Jordan into Canaan, as we read in the beginning of Joshua. Natural motions are quicker the nearer they are to their centre. The Israelites were now drawing near to the promised rest, and now they *set forward*, as the expression is, v. 10. It were well if we would do thus in our way to heaven, rid ground in the latter end of our journey, and the nearer we come to heaven be so much the more active and abundant in the work of the Lord. Two things especially are observable in the brief account here given of these removals:—

1. The wonderful success which God blessed his people with, near the brooks of Arnon, v. 13–15. They had now compassed the land of Edom (which they were not to invade, nor so much as to disturb, Deu. 2:4, 5), and had come to the border of Moab.

It is well that there are more ways than one to Canaan. The enemies of God's people may retard their passage, but cannot prevent their entrance into the promised rest. Care is taken to let us know that the Israelites in their march religiously observed the orders which God gave them to use no hostility against the Moabites (Deu. 2:9), because they were the posterity of righteous Lot; therefore they pitched on the other side of Arnon (v. 13), that side which was now in the possession of the Amorites, one of the devoted nations, though formerly it had belonged to Moab, as appears here, v. 26, 27. This care of theirs not to offer violence to the Moabites is pleaded by Jephtha long afterwards, in his remonstrance against the Ammonites (Jdg. 11:15, etc.), and turned to them for a testimony. What their achievements were, now that they pitched on the banks of the river Arnon, we are not particularly told, but are referred to the *book of the wars of the Lord*, perhaps that book which was begun with the history of the war with the Amalekites, Ex. 17:14. *Write it* (said God) *for a memorial in a book*, to which were added all the other battles which Israel fought, in order, and, among the rest, their actions on the river Arnon, at *Vaheb* in *Suphah* (as our margin reads it) and other places on that river. Or, *it shall be said* (as some read it) *in the rehearsal*, or commemoration, *of the wars of the Lord, what he did in the Red Sea*, when he brought Israel out of Egypt, and what he did *in the brooks of Arnon*, just before he brought them into Canaan. Note, In celebrating the memorials of God's favours to us, it is good to observe the series of them, and how divine goodness and mercy have constantly followed us, even from the Red Sea to the brooks of Arnon. In every stage of our lives, nay, in every step, we should take notice of what God has wrought for us; what he did at such a time, and what in such a place, ought to be distinctly remembered.

2. The wonderful supply which God blessed his people with at *Beer* (v. 16), which signifies the *well* or *fountain*. It is said (v. 10) they pitched in *Oboth*, which signifies *bottles*, so called perhaps because there they filled their bottles with water, which should last them for some time; but by this time, we may suppose, it was with them as it was with Hagar (Gen. 21:15), *The water was spent in the bottle*; yet we do not find that they murmured, and therefore God, in compassion to them, brought them to a well of water, to encourage them to wait on him in humble silence and expectation and to believe that he would graciously take cognizance of their wants, though they did not complain of them. In this world, we do at the best but pitch in *Oboth*, where our comforts lie in close and scanty vessels; when we come to heaven we shall remove to *Beer*, the well of life, the fountain of living waters. Hitherto we have found, when they were supplied with water, they asked it in unjust discontent, and God gave it in just displeasure; but here we find, (1.) That God gave it in love (v. 16): *Gather the people together*, to be witnesses of the wonder, and joint-sharers in the favour, *and I will give them water*. Before they prayed, God granted, and anticipated them with the blessings of his goodness. (2.) That they received it with joy and thankfulness, which made the mercy doubly sweet to them, v. 17. Then they sang this song, to the glory of God and the encouragement of one another, *Spring up, O well!* Thus they pray that it may spring up, for promised mercies must be fetched in by prayer; they triumph that it does spring up, and meet it with their joyful acclamations. With joy must we *draw water out of the wells of salvation*, Isa. 11:3. 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*, Jn. 7:38. Does this well spring up in our souls? We should sing to it; take the comfort to ourselves, and give the glory to God; stir up this gift, sing to it, *Spring up, O well!*

thou *fountain of gardens*, to water my soul (Cant. 4:15), plead the promise, which perhaps alludes to this story (Isa. 41:17, 18), *I will make the wilderness wells of water*. (3.) That whereas before the remembrance of the miracle was perpetuated in the names given to the places, which signified the people's strife and murmuring, now it was perpetuated in a song of praise, which preserved on record the manner in which it was done (v. 18): *The princes digged the well*, the seventy elders, it is probable, *by direction of the lawgiver* (that is, Moses, under God) *with their staves*; that is, with their staves they made holes in the soft and sandy ground, and God caused the water miraculously to spring up in the holes which they made. Thus the pious Israelites long afterwards, *passing through the valley of Baca*, a dry and thirsty place, made wells, and God by rain from heaven filled the pools, Ps. 84:6. Observe, [1.] God promised to give them water, but they must open the ground to receive it, and give it vent. God's favours must be expected in the use of such means as lie within our power, but still the excellency of the power is of God. [2.] The nobles of Israel were forward to set their hands to this work, and used their staves, probable those that were the ensigns of their honour and power, for the public service, and it is upon record to their honour. And we may suppose that it was a great confirmation to them in their offices, and a great comfort to the people, that they were made use of by the divine power as instruments to this miraculous supply. By this it appeared that the spirit of Moses, who must shortly die, rested in some measure upon the nobles of Israel. Moses did not strike the ground himself, as formerly the rock, but gave them direction to do it, that their staves might share in the honour of his rod, and they might comfortably hope that when he should leave them yet God would not, but that they also in their generation should be public blessings, and might expect the divine presence with them as long as they acted by the direction of the lawgiver. For comfort must be looked for only in the way of duty; and, if we would share in divine joys, we must carefully follow the divine direction.

### **Verses 21-35**

We have here an account of the victories obtained by Israel over Sihon and Og, which must be distinctly considered, not only because they are here distinctly related, but because long afterwards the memorial of them is distinctly celebrated, and they are severally assigned as instances of everlasting mercy. He slew *Sihon king of the Amorites, for his mercy endureth for ever, and Og the king of Bashan, for his mercy endureth for ever*, Ps. 136:19, 20.

I. Israel sent a peaceable message to Sihon king of the Amorites (v. 21), but received an unpeaceable return, worse than that of the Edomites to the like message, ch. 20:18, 20. For the Edomites only refused them a passage, and stood upon their own defence to keep them out; but Sihon went out with his forces *against Israel in the wilderness*, out of his own borders, without any provocation given him (v. 23), and so ran himself upon his own ruin. Jephtha intimates that he was prompted by his politics to do this (Jdg. 11:20), *Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast*; but his politics deceived him, for Moses says, *God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into the hand of Israel*, Deu. 2:30. The enemies of God's church are often infatuated in those very counsels which they think most wisely taken. Sihon's army was routed, and not only so, but all his country came into the possession of Israel, v. 24, 25. This seizure is justified, 1. Against the Amorites themselves, for they were the aggressors, and provoked the Israelites to battle; and yet, perhaps, that would not have been sufficient to entitle Israel to their land, but that God himself, the King of nations, the Lord of the whole earth, had given

them a grant of it. The Amorites formed one of the devoted nations whose land God had promised to Abraham and his seed, which promise should be performed when the iniquity of the Amorites should be full, Gen. 15:16. Jephtha insists upon this grant as their title, Jdg. 11:23, 24. The victory which God gave them over the Amorites put them in possession, and then, the promise made to their fathers having given them a right, by virtue of that they kept possession. 2. Against the Moabites, who had formerly been the lords-proprietors of this country. If they should ever lay claim to it, and should plead that God himself had provided that *none of their land should be given to Israel for a possession* (Deu. 2:9), Moses here furnishes posterity with a replication to their plea, and Jephtha makes use of it against the Amorites 260 years afterwards, when Israel's title to this country was questioned. (1.) The justification itself is that though it was true this country had belonged to the Moabites, yet the Amorites had taken it from them some time before, and were now in full and quiet possession of it, v. 26. The Israelites did not take it out of the hands of the Moabites, they had before lost it to the Amorites, and were constrained to give up their pretensions to it; and, when Israel had taken it from the Amorites, they were under no obligation to restore it to the Moabites, whose title to it was long since extinguished. See here the uncertainty of worldly possessions, how often they change their owners, and how soon we may be deprived of them, even when we think ourselves most sure of them; *they make themselves wings*. It is our wisdom therefore to secure the good part which cannot be taken away from us. See also the wisdom of the divine Providence and its perfect foresight, by which preparation is made long before for the accomplishment of all God's purposes in their season. This country being designed in due time for Israel, it is beforehand put into the hand of the Amorites, who little think that they have it but as trustees till Israel come of age, and then must surrender it. We understand not the vast reaches of Providence, but known unto God are all his works, as appears in this instance, that he *set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel*, Deu. 32:8. All that land which he intended for his chosen people he put into the possession of the devoted nations, that were to be driven out. (2.) For proof of the allegation, he refers to the authentic records of the country, for so their proverbs or songs were, one of which he quotes some passages out of (v. 27–30), which sufficiently proves what is vouched for, namely, [1.] That such and such places that are here named, though they had been in the possession of the Moabites, had by right of war become the dominion of Sihon king of the Amorites. Heshbon had become his city, and he obtained such a quiet possession of it that it was built and prepared for him (v. 27), and the country to Dibon and Nophah was likewise subdued, and annexed to the kingdom of the Amorites, v. 30, [2.] That the Moabites were utterly disabled ever to regain the possession. Even Ar of Moab, though not taken or attempted by Sihon, but still remaining the metropolis of Moab, yet was so wasted by this loss that it would never be able to make head, v. 28. The Moabites were undone, and even Chemosh their god had given them up, as unable to rescue them out of the hands of Sihon, v. 29. By all this it appears that the Moabites' claim to this country was barred for ever. There may be a further reason for inserting this Amorite poem, namely, to show that the triumphing of the wicked is short. Those that had conquered the Moabites, and insulted over them, were now themselves conquered and insulted over by the Israel of God. It is very probable that the same Sihon, king of the Amorites, that had got this country from the Moabites, now lost it to the Israelites; for, though it is said to be taken from a former king of Moab (v. 26), yet not by a former king of the Amorites; and then it shows how sometimes justice makes men to

see the loss of that which they got by violence, and were puffed up with the gain of. They are *exalted but for a little while*, Job 24:24.

II. Og king of Bashan, instead of being warned by the fate of his neighbours to make peace with Israel, is instigated by it to make war with them, which proves in like manner to be his destruction. Og was also an Amorite, and therefore perhaps thought himself better able to deal with Israel than his neighbours were, and more likely to prevail, because of his own gigantic strength and stature, which Moses takes notice of, Deu. 3:11, where he gives a more full account of this story. Here observe, 1. That the Amorite begins the war (v. 33): He *went out to battle against Israel*. His country was very rich and pleasant. Bashan was famous for the best timber (witness the oaks of Bashan), and the best breed of cattle, witness the bulls and kine of Bashan, and the lambs and rams of that country, which are celebrated, Deu. 32:14. Wicked men do their utmost to secure themselves and their possessions against the judgments of God, but all in vain, when their day comes, on which they must fall. 2. That God interests himself in the cause, bids Israel not to fear this threatening force, and promises a complete victory: "*I have delivered him into thy hand* (v. 34); the thing is as good as done already, it is all thy own, enter and take possession." Giants are but worms before God's power. 3. That Israel is more than a conqueror, not only routs the enemies' army, but gains the enemies' country, which afterwards was part of the inheritance of the two tribes and a half that were first seated on the other side Jordan. God gave Israel these successes, while Moses was yet with them, both for his comfort (that he might see the beginning of that glorious work, which he must not live to see the finishing of) and for the encouragement of the people in the war of Canaan under Joshua. Though this was to them in comparison but as the day of small things, yet it was an earnest of great things.

## Chapter 22

At this chapter begins the famous story of Balak and Balaam, their attempt to curse Israel, and the baffling of that attempt; God's people are long afterwards told to remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, that they might know the righteousness of the Lord, Mic. 6:5. In this chapter we have, I. Balak's fear of Israel, and the plot he had to get them cursed (v. 1-4). II. The embassy he sent to Balaam, a conjurer, to fetch him for that purpose, and the disappointment he met with in the first embassy (v. 5-14). III. Balaam's coming to him upon his second message (v. 15-21). IV. The opposition Balaam met with by the way (v. 22-35). V. The interview at length between Balak and Balaam (v. 36, etc.).

### Verses 1-14

The children of Israel have at length finished their wanderings in the wilderness, out of which they went up (ch. 21:18), and are now encamped in the plains of Moab near Jordan, where they continued till they passed through Jordan under Joshua, after the death of Moses. Now we have here,

I. The fright which the Moabites were in upon the approach of Israel, v. 2-4. They needed not to fear any harm from them if they knew (and it is probable that Moses let them know) the orders God had given to Israel not to contend with the Moabites, nor to use any hostility against them, Deu. 2:9. But, if they had any notice of this, they were jealous that it was but a sham, to make them secure, that they might be the more easily conquered. Notwithstanding the old friendship between Abraham and Lot, the Moabites resolved to ruin Israel if they could, and therefore they will take it for granted, without any ground for the suspicion, that Israel resolves to ruin them. Thus it is common for those that design mischief to pretend that mischief is designed against them; and their groundless jealousies must be the colour of their causeless malice. They hear of their triumphs over the Amorites (v. 2), and think that their own house is in danger when their neighbour's is on fire. They observe their multitudes (v. 3): *They were many*; and hence infer how easily they would conquer their country, and all about them if some speedy and effectual course were not taken to stop the progress of their victorious arms: "They shall *lick up* or devour us, and *all that are round about us*, as speedily and irresistibly *as the ox eats up the grass*" (v. 4), owning themselves to be an unequal match for so formidable an enemy. Therefore they were sorely afraid and distressed themselves; thus were the wicked *in great fear where no fear was*, Ps. 53:5. These fears they communicated to their neighbours, the elders of Midian, that some measures might be concerted between them for their common safety; for, if the kingdom of Moab fall, the republic of Midian cannot stand long. The Moabites, if they had pleased, might have made a good use of the advances of Israel, and their successes against the Amorites. They had reason to rejoice, and give God and Israel thanks for freeing them from the threatening power of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had taken from them part of their country, and was likely to overrun the rest. They had reason likewise to court Israel's friendship, and to come in to their assistance; but having forsaken the religion of their father Lot, and being sunk into idolatry, they hated the people of the God of Abraham, and were justly infatuated in their counsels and given up to distress.

II. The project which the king of Moab formed to get the people of Israel cursed, that is, to set God against them, who, he perceived, hitherto fought for them. He trusted more to his arts than to his arms, and had a notion that if he could but get some prophet or other, with his powerful charms, to imprecate evil upon them, and to pronounce a blessing upon himself and his forces, then, though otherwise too weak, he should be able to deal with them. This notion arose, 1. Out of the remains of some religion; for it owns a dependence upon some visible sovereign powers that rule in the affairs of the children of men and determine them, and an obligation upon us to make application to these powers. 2. Out of the ruins of the true religion; for if the Midianites and Moabites had not wretchedly degenerated from the faith and worship of their pious ancestors, Abraham and Lot, they could not have imagined it possible to do any mischief with their curses to a people who alone adhered to the service of the true God, from whose service they had themselves revolted.

III. The court which he made to Balaam the son of Beor, a famous conjurer, to engage him to curse Israel. The Balaam lived a great way off, in that country whence Abraham came, and where Laban lived; but, though it was probable that there were many nearer home that were pretenders to divination, yet none had so great a reputation for success as Balaam, and Balak will employ the best he can hear of, though he send a great way for him, so much is his heart upon this project. And to gain him, 1. He makes him his friend, complaining to him, as his confidant, of the danger he was in from the numbers and neighbourhood of the camp of Israel: *They cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me*, v. 5. 2. In effect he makes him his god, by the great power he attributes to his word: *He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed*, v. 6. The learned bishop Patrick inclines to think, with many of the Jewish writers, that Balaam had been a great prophet, who, for the accomplishment of his predictions and the answers of his prayers, both for good and evil, had been looked upon justly as a man of great interest with God; but that, growing proud and covetous, God departed from him, and then, to support his sinking credit, he betook himself to diabolical arts. He is called a *prophet* (2 Pt. 2:16,) because he had been one, or perhaps he had raised his reputation from the first by his magical charms, as Simon Magus, who bewitched the people so far that he was called *the great power of God*, Acts 8:10. Curses pronounced by God's prophets in the name of the Lord have wonderful effects, as Noah's (Gen. 9:25), and Elisha's, 2 Ki. 2:24. But the curse *causeless shall not come* (Prov. 26:2), no more than Goliath's, when he *curse David by his gods*, 1 Sa. 17:43. Let us desire to have the prayers of God's ministers and people for us, and dread having them against us; for they are greatly regarded by him who blesseth indeed and curseth indeed. But Balak cannot rely upon these compliments as sufficient to prevail with Balaam, the main inducement is yet behind (v. 7): they took *the rewards of divination in their hand, the wages of unrighteousness, which he loved*, 2 Pt. 2:15.

IV. The restraint God lays upon Balaam, forbidding him to curse Israel. It is very probable that Balaam, being a curious inquisitive man, was no stranger to Israel's case and character, but had heard that God was with them of a truth, so that he ought to have given the messengers their answer immediately, that he would never curse a people whom God had blessed; but he lodges the messengers, and takes a night's time to consider what he shall do, and to receive instructions from God, v. 8. When we enter into a parley with temptations we are in great danger of being overcome by them. In the night God comes to him, probably in a dream, and enquires what business those strangers had with him. He knows it, but he will know it from him.

Balaam gives him an account of their errand (v. 9–11), and God thereupon charges him not to go with them, or attempt to curse that blessed people, v. 12. Thus God sometimes, for the preservation of his people, was pleased to speak to bad men, as to Abimelech (Gen. 20:3), and to Laban, Gen. 31:24. And we read of some that were workers of iniquity, and yet in Christ's name prophesied, and *did many wondrous works*. Balaam is charged not only not to go to Balak, but not to offer to curse this people, which he might have attempted at a distance; and the reason is given: *They are blessed*. This was part of the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), *I will curse him that curseth thee*; so that an attempt to curse them would be not only fruitless, but perilous. Israel had often provoked God in the wilderness, yet he will not suffer their enemies to curse them, for he *rewards them not according to their iniquities*. The blessedness of those whose sin is covered comes upon them, Rom. 4:6, 7.

V. The return of the messengers without Balaam. 1. Balaam is not faithful in returning God's answer to the messengers, v. 13. He only tells them, *the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you*. He did not tell them, as he ought to have done, that Israel was a blessed people, and must by no means be cursed; for then the design would have been crushed, and the temptation would not have been renewed: but he, in effect, desired them to give his humble service to Balak, and let him know that he applauded his project, and would have been very glad to gratify him, but that truly he had the character of a prophet, and must not go without leave from God, which he had not yet obtained, and therefore for the present he must be excused. Note, Those are a fair mark for Satan's temptation that speak diminishingly of divine prohibitions, as if they amounted to no more than the denial of a permission, and as if to go against God's law were only to go without his leave. 2. The messengers are not faithful in returning Balaam's answer to Balak. All the account they give of it is, *Balaam refuseth to come with us* (v. 14), intimating that he only wanted more courtship and higher proffers; but they are not willing Balak should know that God had signified his disallowance of the attempt. Thus are great men wretchedly abused by the flatteries of those about them, who do all they can to prevent their seeing their own faults and follies.

### **Verses 15-21**

We have here a second embassy sent to Balaam, to fetch him over to curse Israel. It were well for us if we were as earnest and constant in prosecuting a good work, notwithstanding disappointments, as Balak was in pursuing this ill design. The enemies of the church are restless and unwearied in their attempts against it; but he that sits in heaven laughs at them. Observe, I. The temptation Balak laid before Balaam. He contrived to make this assault more vigorous than the former. It is very probable that he sent double money in the hands of his messengers; but, besides that, now he tempted him with honours, laid a bait not only for his covetousness, but for his pride and ambition. How earnestly should we beg of God daily to mortify in us these two limbs of the old man! Those that know how to look with a holy contempt upon worldly wealth and preferment will find it not so hard a matter as most men do to keep a good conscience. See how artfully Balak managed the temptation. 1. The messengers he sent were *more, and more honourable*, v. 15. He sent to this conjurer with as great respect and deference to his quality as if he had been a sovereign prince, apprehending perhaps that Balaam had thought himself slighted in the fewness and meanness of the former messengers. 2. The request was very urgent. This powerful prince becomes a suitor to him: "*Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee* (v. 16), no, not God, nor conscience, nor any fear either of sin or shame." 3. The proffers were

high: *"I will promote thee to very great honour among the princes of Moab;"* nay, he gives him a blank, and he shall write his own terms: *I will do whatsoever thou sayest*, that is, "I will give thee whatever thou desirest, and observe whatever thou orderest; thy word shall be a law to me," v. 17. Thus sinners stick at no pains, spare no cost, and care not how low they stoop, for the gratifying either of their luxury or of their malice; shall we then be stiff and strait-handed in our compliance with the laws of virtue? God forbid.

II. Balaam's seeming resistance of, but real yielding to, this temptation. We may here discern in Balaam a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions. 1. His convictions charged him to adhere to the command of God, and he spoke their language, v. 18. Nor could any man have said better: *"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, and that is more than he can give or I can ask, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God."* See how honourably he speaks of God; he is *Jehovah, my God*. Note, Many call God theirs that are not his, not *truly* because not *only* his; *they swear by the Lord, and by Malcham*. See how respectfully he speaks of the word of God, as one resolved to stick to it, and in nothing to vary from it, and how slightly of the wealth of this world, as if gold and silver were nothing to him in comparison with the favour of God; and yet, at the same time, the searcher of hearts knew that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. Note, It is an easy thing for bad men to speak very good words, and with their mouth to make a show of piety. There is no judging of men by their words. God knows the heart. 2. His corruptions at the same time strongly inclined him to go contrary to the command. He seemed to refuse the temptation, v. 18. But even then he expressed no abhorrence of it, as Christ did when he had the kingdoms of the world offered him (*Get thee hence Satan*), and as Peter did when Simon Magus offered him money: *Thy money perish with thee*. But it appears (v. 19) that he had a strong inclination to accept the proffer; for he would further attend, to know what God would say to him, hoping that he might alter his mind and give him leave to go. This was a vile reflection upon God Almighty, as if he could change his mind, and now at last suffer those to be cursed whom he had pronounced blessed, and as if he would be brought to allow what he had already declared to be evil. Surely he thought God *altogether such a one as himself*. He had already been told what the will of God was, in which he ought to have acquiesced, and not to have desired a re-hearing of that cause which was already so plainly determined. Note, It is a very great affront to God, and a certain evidence of the dominion of corruption in the heart, to beg leave to sin.

III. The permission God gave him to go, v. 20. God came to him, probably by an angel, and told him he might, if he pleased, go with Balak's messengers. *So he gave him up to his own heart's lust*. "Since thou hast such a mind to go, even go, yet know that *the journey thou undertakest shall not be for thy honour*; for, though thou hast leave to go, thou shalt not, as thou hopest, have leave to curse, *for the word which I shall say unto thee, that thou shalt do*." Note, God has wicked men in a chain; *hitherto they shall come* by his permission, but no further that he does permit them. Thus he makes the wrath of man to praise him, yet, at the same time, restrains the remainder of it. It was in anger that God said to Balaam, "Go with them," and we have reason to think that Balaam himself so understood it, for we do not find him pleading this allowance when God reproved him for going. Note, As God sometimes denies the prayers of his people in love, so sometimes he grants the desires of the wicked in wrath.

IV. His setting out in the journey, v. 21. God gave him leave to go *if the men called him*, but he was so fond of the journey that we do not find he staid for their calling him, but he himself *rose up in the morning*, got every thing ready with all speed, and *went with the princes of Moab*, who were proud enough that they had carried their point. The apostle describes Balaam's sin here to be that he *ran greedily into an error for reward*, Jude 11. The love of money is the root of all evil.

### Verses 22-35

We have here an account of the opposition God gave to Balaam in his journey towards Moab; probably the princes had gone before, or gone some other way, and Balaam had pointed out where he would meet them, or where they should stay for him, for we read nothing of them in this part of our narrative, only that Balaam, like a person of some quality, was attended with his two men-honour enough, one would think, for such a man, he needed not be beholden to Balak for promotion.

I. Here is God's displeasure against Balaam for undertaking this journey: God's *anger was kindled because he went*, v. 22.

Note, 1. The sin of sinners is not to be thought the less provoking to God because he permits it. We must not think that, because God does not by his providence restrain men from sin, therefore he approves of it, or that it is therefore not hateful to him; he suffers sin, and yet is angry at it. 2. Nothing is more displeasing to God than malicious designs against his people; he that touches them touches the apple of his eye.

II. The way God took to let Balaam know his displeasure against him: *An angel stood in the way for an adversary*. Now God fulfilled his promise to Israel (Ex. 23:22), *I will be an enemy to thy enemies*. The holy angels are adversaries to sin, and perhaps are employed more than we are aware of in preventing it, particularly in opposing those that have any ill designs against God's church and people, for whom Michael our prince stands up, Dan. 12:1; 10:21. What a comfort is this to all that wish well to the Israel of God, that he never suffers wicked men to form an attempt against them, without sending his holy angels forth to break the attempt and secure his little ones! When the prophet saw the four horns that scattered Judah, at the same time he saw four carpenters that were to fray those horns, Zec. 1:18, etc. When the *enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him*. This angel was an adversary to Balaam, because Balaam counted him his adversary; otherwise those are really our best friends, and we are so to reckon them, that stop our progress in a sinful way. The angel stood with his sword drawn (v. 23), *a flaming sword*, like that in the hands of the cherubim (Gen. 3:24), *turning every way*. Note, The holy angels are at war with those with whom God is angry, for they are the ministers of his justice. Observe, 1. Balaam had notice given him of God's displeasure, by the ass, and this *did not startle him*. The *ass saw the angel*, v. 23. How vainly did Balaam boast that he was a man whose *eyes were open*, and that he *saw the visions of the Almighty* (ch. 24:3, 4), when the ass he rode on saw more than he did, his eyes being blinded with covetousness and ambition and dazzled with the rewards of divination! Note, Many have God against them, and his holy angels, but are not aware of it. The *ass knows his owner*, sees his danger, but Balaam does *not know, does not consider*, Isa. 1:3. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see*, Isa. 26:11. Let none be puffed up with a conceit of visions and revelations, when even an ass saw an angel; yet let those be ashamed of their own sottishness, worse than that of the beasts that perish, who, when they are told of the sword of God's wrath drawn against them, while they persist in wicked ways, yet will go on: the ass understood the law of self-preservation

better than so; for, to save both herself and her senseless rider, (1.) She *turned aside out of the way*, v. 23. Balaam should have taken the hint of this, and considered whether he was not out of the way of his duty; but, instead of this, he *beat her into the way again*. Thus those who by wilful sin are running headlong into perdition are angry at those that would prevent their ruin. (2.) She had not gone much further before she saw the angel again, and she, to avoid him, *ran up to a wall*, and *crushed her rider's foot*, v. 24, 25. How many ill accidents are we liable to in travelling upon the road, from which if we are preserved we must own our obligations to the divine Providence, which by the ministry of angels *keeps us in all our ways, lest we dash our foot against a stone*; but, if we at any time meet with a disaster, it should put us upon enquiring whether our way be right in the sight of God or no. The crushing of Balaam's foot, though it was the saving of his life, provoked him so much that he smote his ass the second time, so angry are we apt to be at that which, though a present uneasiness, yet is a real kindness. (3.) Upon the next encounter with the angel, the ass fell down under Balaam, v. 26, 27. He ought to have considered that there was certainly something extraordinary in this; for his ass was not restive, nor did she use to serve him thus: but it is common for those whose hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* to push on violently, and break through all the difficulties which Providence lays in their way to give check to them and to stop them in their career. Balaam the third time smote his ass, though she had now done him the best piece of service that ever she did him, saving him from the sword of the angel, and by her falling down teaching him to do likewise. (4.) When all this would not work upon him, God opened the mouth of the ass, and she spoke to him once and again; and yet neither did this move him: *The Lord opened the mouth of the ass*, v. 28. This was a great miracle, quite above the power of nature, and wrought by the power of the God of nature, who made man's mouth, and taught him to speak, for otherwise (since we learn to speak purely by imitation, and therefore those that are born deaf are consequently dumb) the first man would never have spoken, nor any of his seed. He that made man speak could, when he pleased, make the ass to *speak with man's voice*, 2 Pt. 2:16. Here Mr. Ainsworth observes that the devil, when he tempted our first parents to sin, employed a subtle serpent, but that God, when he would convince Balaam, employed a silly ass, a creature dull and sottish to a proverb; for Satan corrupts men's minds by the *craftiness of those that lie in wait to deceive*, but Christ has *chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*. By a dumb ass God rebukes the madness of the prophet, for he will never want reprovers, but when he pleases can make the stones cry out as witnesses to him, Lu. 19:40; Hab. 2:11. [1.] The ass complained of Balaam's cruelty (v. 28): *What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me?* Note, The righteous God will not see the meanest and weakest abused; but either they shall be enabled to speak in their own defence or he will some way or other speak for them. If God would not suffer a beast to be wronged, much less a man, a Christian, a child of his own. We cannot *open the mouth of the dumb*, as God did here, but we may and must *open our mouth for the dumb*, Prov. 31:8; Job 31:13. The ass's complaint was just: *What have I done?* Note, When we are prompted to smite any with hand or tongue, we should consider what they have done unto us, and what provocation they have given us. We hear it not, but thus the whole creation groans, being burdened, Rom. 8:22. It was much that Balaam was not astonished to hear his ass speak, and put to confusion: but some think that it was no new thing to him (being a conjurer) to be thus spoken to by his familiars; others rather think that his brutish head-strong passion so blinded him that he could not observe or consider the strangeness of the thing. Nothing besots men worse than

unbridled anger. Balaam in his fury *wished he had a sword to kill his ass with*, v. 29. See his impotency; can he think by his curses to do mischief to Israel that has it not in his power to kill his own ass? This he cannot do, yet he fain would; and what would he get by that, but make himself so much the poorer (as many do), to gratify his passion and revenge? Such was the madness of this false prophet. Here bishop Hall observes, It is ill falling into the hands of those whom the brute-creatures find unmerciful; for *a good man regardeth the life of his beast*. [2.] The ass reasoned with him, v. 30. God enabled not only a dumb creature to speak, but a dull creature to speak to the purpose. Three things she argues with him from:—*First*, His propriety in her: *Am not I thy ass?* Note, 1. God has given to man a dominion over the creatures: they are *delivered into his hand* to be used, and *put under his feet* to be ruled. 2. Even wicked people have a title to the possessions God gives to them, which they are not to be wronged of. 3. The dominion God has given us over the creatures is a good reason why we should not abuse them. We are their lords, and therefore must not be tyrants. *Secondly*, Her serviceableness to him: *On which thou hast ridden*. Note, It is good for us often to consider how useful the inferior creatures are, and have been, to us, that we may be thankful to God, and tender of them. *Thirdly*, That she was not wont to do so by him, and had never before crushed his foot, nor fallen down under him; he might therefore conclude there was something more than ordinary that made her do so now. Note, 1. The rare occurrence of an offence should moderate our displeasure against an offender. 2. When the creatures depart from their wonted obedience to us, we should enquire the cause within ourselves, and be humbled for our sin.

2. Balaam at length had notice of God's displeasure by the angel, and this did startle him. When God opened his eyes *he saw the angel* (v. 31), and then he himself *fell flat upon his face*, in reverence of that glorious messenger, and in fear of the sword he saw in his hand. God has many ways of breaching and bringing down the hard and unhumbled heart. (1.) The angel reprov'd him for his outrageousness (v. 32, 33): *Wherefore hast thou smitten thy ass?* Whether we consider it or no, it is certain that God will call us to account for the abuses done to his creatures. Nay, he shows him how much more reason he had to smite upon his breast, and to condemn himself, than to fly out thus against his ass ("*Thy way is perverse before me*, and then how canst thou expect to prosper?"), and how much wiser his ass was than himself, and how much beholden he was to her that she turned aside; it was for his safety, and not for her own, for had she gone on he had been slain, and she had been saved alive. Note, When our eyes are opened we shall see what danger we are in in a sinful way, and how much it was for our advantage to be crossed in it, and what fools we were to quarrel with our crosses which helped to save our lives. (2.) Balaam then seemed to relent (v. 34): *"I have sinned, sinned in undertaking this journey, sinned in pushing on so violently;"* but he excused it with this, that he saw not the angel; yet, now that he did see him, he was willing to go back again. That which was displeasing to God was not so much his going as his going with a malicious design against Israel, and a secret hope that notwithstanding the proviso with which his permission was clogged he might prevail to curse them, and so gratify Balak, and get preferment under him. It does not appear that he was sensible of this wickedness of his heart, or willing to own it, but, when he finds he cannot go forward, he will be content (since there is no remedy) to go back. Here is no sign that his heart is turned, but, if his hands are tied, he cannot help it. Thus many leave their sins only because their sins have left them. There seems to be a reformation of the life, but what will this avail if there be no renovation of the heart? (3.) The angel however continued his permission: *"Go*

*with the men*, v. 35. Go, if thou hast a mind to be made a fool of, and to be shamed before Balak, and all the princes of Moab. Go, only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak, whether thou wilt or no," for this seems not to be a precept, but a prediction of the event, that he should not only not be able to curse Israel, but should be forced to bless them, which would be more for the glory of God and his own confusion than if he had turned back. Thus God gave him fair warning, but he would not take it; he *went with the princes of Balak*. For the iniquity of Balaam's covetousness God was wroth, and smote him, but he *went on frowardly*, Isa. 57:17.

### **Verses 36-41**

We have here the meeting between Balak and Balaam, confederate enemies to God's Israel; but here they seem to differ in their expectations of the success. 1. Balak speaks of it with confidence, not doubting but to gain his point now that Balaam had come. In expectation of this, he went out to meet him, even to the utmost border of his country (v. 36), partly to gratify his own impatient desire to see one he had such great expectations from, and partly to do honour to Balaam, and so to engage him with his utmost power to serve him. See what respect heathen princes paid to those that had but the name and face of prophets, and pretended to have any interest in heaven; and how welcome one was that came with his mouth full of curses. What a shame is it then that the ambassadors of Christ are so little respected by most, so much despised by some, and that those are so coldly entertained who bring tidings of peace and a blessing! Balak has now nothing to complain of but that Balaam did not come sooner, v. 37. And he thinks that he should have considered the importunity Balak had used, *Did I not earnestly send to thee?* (and the importunity of people inferior to kings has prevailed with many against their inclinations), and that he should also have considered Balak's intentions concerning him: *Am not I able to promote thee to honour?* Balak, as king, was in his own kingdom the fountain of honour, and Balaam should have his choice of all the preferments that were in his gift; he therefore thinks himself affronted by Balaam's delays, which looked as if he thought the honours he prepared not worthy his acceptance. Note, Promotion to honour is a very tempting bait to many people; and it were well if we would be drawn into the service of God by the honour he sets before us. Why do we delay to come unto him? *Is not he able to promote us to honour?* 2. Balaam speaks doubtfully of the issue, and bids Balak not depend too much upon him (v. 38): *"Have I now any power at all to say any thing?"* I have come, but what the nearer am I? Gladly would I curse Israel; but I must not, I cannot, God will not suffer me." He seems to speak with vexation at the hook in his nose and the bridle in his jaws, such as Sennacherib was tied up with, Isa. 37:29. 3. They address themselves with all speed to the business. Balaam is nobly entertained over night, a sacrifice of thanksgiving is offered to the gods of Moab, for the safe arrival of this welcome guest, and his is treated with a feast upon the sacrifice, v. 40. And the next morning, that no time might be lost, Balak takes Balaam in his chariot to the high places of his kingdom, not only because their holiness (such as it was), he thought, might give some advantage to his divinations, but their height might give him a convenient prospect of the camp of Israel, which was to be the butt or mark at which he must shoot his envenomed arrows. And now Balaam is really as solicitous to please Balak as ever he had pretended to be to please God. See what need we have to pray every day, *Our Father in heaven, lead us not into temptation.*

## Chapter 23

In this chapter we have Balak and Balaam busy at work to do Israel a mischief, and, for ought that appears, neither Moses nor the elders of Israel know any thing of the matter, nor are in a capacity to break the snare; but God, who keeps Israel, and neither slumbers nor sleeps, baffles the attempt, without any intercession or contrivance of theirs. Here is, I. The first attempt to curse Israel. 1. The preparation made for it by sacrifice (v. 1-3). 2. The contrary instruction God gave Balaam (v. 4, 5). 3. The blessing Balaam was compelled to pronounce upon Israel, instead of a curse (v. 7-10). 4. The great disappointment of Balak (v. 11, 12). II. The second attempt, in the same manner made, and in the same manner frustrated (v. 13-26). III. Preparations made for a third attempt (v. 27-30), the issue of which we have in the next chapter.

### Verses 1-12

Here is, I. Great preparation made for the cursing of Israel. That which was aimed at was to engage the God of Israel to forsake them, and either to be on Moab's side or to stand neuter. O the sottishness of superstition, to imagine that God will be at men's beck! Balaam and Balak think to bribe him with altars and sacrifices, offered without any warrant or institution of his: as if he would *eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats*. Ridiculous nonsense, to think that these would please God, and gain his favour, when there could be in them no exercise either of faith or obedience! Yet, it should seem, they offered these sacrifices to the God of heaven the supreme *Numen—Divinity*, and not to any of their local deities. But the multiplying of altars was an instance of their degeneracy from the religion of their ancestors, and their apostasy to idolatry; for those that multiplied altars multiplied gods. *Ephraim made many altars to sin*, Hos. 8:11. *Thus they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, but became vain in their imaginations*; and yet presumptuously expected hereby to gain God over to them from Israel, who had his sanctuary among them, and his anointed altar. Observe here, 1. How very imperious Balaam was, proud to have the command of a king and to give law to princes. Such is the spirit of that wicked one who exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. With what authority does Balaam give orders! *Build me here* (in the place I have pitched upon) *seven altars*, of stone or turf. Thus he covers his malice against Israel with a show of devotion, but his sacrifice was an abomination, being brought with such a *wicked mind*, Prov. 21:27. That which he aimed at was not to honour God with the sacrifices of righteousness, but to enrich himself with the wages of unrighteousness. 2. How very obsequious Balak was. The altars were presently built, and the sacrifices prepared, the best of the sort, *seven bullocks and seven rams*. Balak makes no objection to the charge, nor does he snuff at it, or think it either a weariness or a disparagement to *stand by his burnt-offering* as Balaam ordered him.

II. The turning of the curse into a blessing, by the overruling power of God, in love to Israel, which is the account Moses gives of it, Deu. 23:5.

1. God puts the blessing into the mouth of Balaam. While the sacrifices were burning, Balaam retired; he *went solitary*, into some dark grove on the top of the high place, v. 3, marg. Thus much he knew, that solitude gives a good opportunity for communion with God; those that would meet with him must retire from the world, and the business and conversation of it, and

love to be private, reckoning themselves never less alone than when alone, because the Father is with them. Enter therefore into thy closet, and shut the door, and be assured that God will meet thee if thou *seek him in the due order*. But Balaam retired with a peradventure only, having some thoughts that God might meet him; but being conscious to himself of guilt, and knowing that God had lately met him in anger, he had reason to speak doubtfully: *Peradventure the Lord will come to meet me, v. 3. But let not such a man think that he shall receive any favour from God*. Nay, it should seem, though he pretended to go and meet with God, he really designed to use enchantments; see ch. 24:1. But, whatever he intended. God designed to serve his own glory by him, and therefore *met Balaam, v. 4. What communion has light with darkness?* No friendly communion, we may be sure. Balaam's way was still perverse, and God was still an adversary to him; but, Balak having chosen him for his oracle, God would constrain him to utter such a confession, to the honour of god and Israel, as should render those for ever inexcusable who should appear in arms against them. When Balaam was aware that God met him, probably by an angel, he boasted of his performances: *I have prepared seven altars, and offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram*. How had he done it? It cost him nothing; it was done at Balak's expense; yet, (1.) He boasts of it, as if he had done some mighty thing. The acts of devotion which are done in hypocrisy are commonly reflected upon with pride and vain glory. Thus the Pharisee went up to the temple to boast of his religion, Lu. 18:11, 12. (2.) He insists upon it as a reason why God should gratify him in his desire to curse Israel, as if now he had made God his debtor, and might draw upon him for what he pleased. He thinks God is so much beholden to him for these sacrifices that the least he can do in recompense for them is to sacrifice his Israel to the malice of the king of Moab. Note, It is a common cheat that wicked people put upon themselves, to think that by the shows of piety they may prevail with God to countenance them, and connive at them, in their greatest immoralities, especially in persecution, Isa. 66:5. However, thought the sacrifice was an abomination, God took the occasion of Balaam's expectation to *put a word into his mouth (v. 5); for the answer of the tongue if from the Lord*, and thus he would show how much those are mistaken who say, *With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are our own*, Ps. 12:4. He that made man's mouth knows how to manage it, and to serve his own purposes by it. This speaks terror to daring sinners, that *set their mouth against the heavens. God can make their own tongues to fall upon them*, Ps. 64:8. And it speaks comfort to God's witnesses, whom at any time he calls out to appear for 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 edify his people by their testimony, but it *shall be given them in that same hour what they should speak*.

2. Balaam pronounces the blessing in the ears of Balak. He found him *standing by his burnt-sacrifice (v. 6)*, closely attending it, and earnestly expecting the success. those that wold have an answer of peace from God must abide by the sacrifice, and *attend on the Lord without distraction, not weary in well doing*. Balaam, having fixed himself in the place appointed for his denouncing curses against Israel, which perhaps he had drawn up in form ready to deliver, takes up his parable, and it proves a blessing, v. 7. He pronounces Israel safe and happy, and so blesses them.

(1.) He pronounces them safe, and out of the reach of his envenomed darts. [1.] He owns that the design was to curse them, that Balak sent for him out of his own country, and that he came, with that intent, v. 7. The message sent to him was, *Come,*

*curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.* Balak intended to make war upon them, and he would have Balaam to bless his arms, and to prophesy and pray for the ruin of Israel. [2.] He owns the design defeated, and his own inability to accomplish it. He could not so much as give them an ill word or an ill wish: *How shall I curse those whom God has not cursed?* v. 8. Not that therefore he would not do it, but therefore he could not do it. this is a fair confession, *First*, Of the weakness and impotency of his own magic skill, for which others valued him so much, and doubtless he valued himself no less. He was the most celebrated man of that profession, and yet owns himself baffled. God had warned the Israelites not to use divination (Lev. 19:31), and this providence gave them a reason for that law, by showing them the weakness and folly of it. As they had seen the magicians of Egypt befooled, so, here, the great conjurer of the east. See Isa. 47:12–14. *Secondly*, It is a confession of the sovereignty and dominion of the divine power. He owns that he could do no more than God would suffer him to do, for God could overrule all his purposes, and turn his counsels headlong. *Thirdly*, It is a confession of the inviolable security of the people of God. Note, 1. God's Israel are owned and blessed of him. He has not cursed them, for they are delivered from the curse of the law; he has not defied them, nor rejected or abandoned them, though mean and vile. 2. Those that have the good-will of Heaven have the ill-will of hell; the serpent and this seed have an enmity to them. 3. Though the enemies of God's people may prevail far against them, yet they cannot curse them; that is, they cannot do them any real mischief, much less a ruining mischief, for they cannot *separate them from the love of God*, Rom. 8:39.

(2.) He pronounces them happy in three things:—

[1.] Happy in their peculiarity, and distinction from the rest of the nations: *From the top of the rock I see him*, v. 9. And it seems to have been a great surprise to him that whereas, it is probable, they were represented to him as a rude and disorderly rabble, that infested the countries round about in rambling parties, he was them a regular incorporated camp, in which appeared all the marks of discipline and good order; he saw them a people dwelling alone, and foresaw they would continue so, and their singularity would be their unspeakable honour. Persons of quality we call person of *distinction*; this was Israel's praise, though their enemies turned it to their reproach, that they differed from all the neighbouring nations, not only in their religion and sacred rites, but in their diet, and dress, and common usages, as a people called out of the world, and not to be conformed to it. They never lost their reputation till they *mingled among the heathen*, Ps. 106:35. Note, It is the duty and honour of those that are dedicated to God to be separated from the world, and not to walk according to the course and custom of it. Those who make conscience of peculiar duties may take the comfort of peculiar privileges, which it is probable Balaam has an eye to here. God's Israel shall not stand upon a level with other nations, but be dignified above them all, as a people near to God, and set apart for him.

[2.] Happy in their numbers, not so few and despicable as they were represented to him, but an innumerable company, which made them both honourable and formidable (v. 10): *Who can count the dust of Jacob?* The number of the people was the thing that Balak was vexed at (ch. 22:3): *Moab was afraid of them, because they were many*; and God does here by Balaam promote that fear and vexation, foretelling their further increase. Balak would have him see *the utmost part of the people* (ch. 22:41), hoping the more he saw of them the more he would be exasperated against them, and throw about his curses with the more

keenness and rage; but it proved quite contrary: instead of being angry at their numbers, he admired them. The better acquainted we are with God's people the better opinion we have of them. He takes notice of the number, *First*, Of the *dust of Jacob*; that is, the people of Jacob, concerning whom it was foretold that they should be as the dust for number, Gen. 28:14. Thus he owns the fulfilling of the promise made to the fathers, and expects that it should be yet further accomplished. Perhaps it was part of David's fault in numbering the people that he offered to count the dust of Jacob, which God had said should be innumerable. *Secondly*, Of the *fourth part of Israel*, alluding to the form of their camp, which was cast into four squadrons, under four standards. Note, God's Israel are a very great body, his spiritual Israel are so, and they will appear to be so when they shall all be gathered together unto him in the great day, Rev. 7:9.

[3.] Happy in their end: *Let me die the death of the righteous* Israelites, that are in covenant with God, and let my *last end, or future state, be like theirs, or my recompence*, namely, in the other world. Here, *First*, It is taken for granted that death is the end of all men; the righteous themselves must die: and it is good for us to think of this with application, as Balaam himself does here, speaking of his own death. *Secondly*, he goes upon the supposition of the soul's immortality, and a different state on the other side death, to which this is a noble testimony, and an evidence of its being anciently known and believed. For how could the death of the righteous be more desirable than the death of the wicked upon any other account than as it involved happiness in another world, since in the manner and circumstances of dying we see *all things come alike to all*? *Thirdly*, He pronounces the righteous truly blessed, not only while they live, but when they die, which makes their death not only more desirable than the death of others, but even more desirable than life itself; for in that sense his wish may be taken. Not only, "When I do die, let me die the death of the righteous;" but, "I could even now be willing to die, on condition that I might *die the death of the righteous*, and reach my end this moment, provided it might be like his." Very near the place where Balaam now was, on one of the mountains of Moab, not long after this, Moses died, and to that perhaps God, who put this word into his mouth, designed it should have a reference, that by it Moses might be encouraged to go up and die such a death as Balaam himself wished to die. *Fourthly*, He shows his opinion of religion to be better than his resolution; there are many who desire to die the death of the righteous, but do not endeavour to live the life of the righteous. Gladly would they have their end like theirs, but not their way. They would be saints in heaven, but not saints on earth. This is the *desire of the slothful, which kills him, because his hands refuse to labour*. This of Balaam's is only a wish, not a prayer, and it is a vain wish, being only a wish for the end, without any care for the means. Thus far this blessing goes, even to death, and beyond it, as far as the last end. Now,

III. We are told, 1. How Balak fretted at it, v. 11. He pretended to honour the Lord with his sacrifices, and to wait for the answer God would send him; and yet, when it did not prove according to his mind, he forgot God, and flew into a great passion against Balaam, as if it had been purely his doing: "*What hast thou done unto me! How hast thou disappointed me!*" Sometimes God makes the enemies of his church a vexation one to another, while he that sits in heaven laughs at them, and the efforts of their impotent malice. 2. How Balaam was forced to acquiesce in it. He submits because he cannot help it, and yet humours the thing with no small address, as if he had been peculiarly conscientious, answering Balak with the gravity of a prophet: *Must I*

*not take heed to speak that which the Lord has put in my mouth?* v. 12. Thus a confession of God's overruling power is extorted from a wicked prophet, to the further confusion of a wicked prince.

### **Verses 13-30**

Here is, I. Preparation made the second time, as before, for the cursing of Israel. 1. The place is changed, v. 13. Balak fancied that Balaam, having so full a prospect of the whole camp of Israel, *from the top of the rocks* (v. 9), was either so enamoured with the beauty of it that he would not curse them or so affrighted with the terror of it that he durst not; and therefore he would bring him to another place, from which he might see only some part of them, which would appear more despicable, and that part at least which would lie in view he hoped he might obtain leave to curse, and so by degrees he should get ground against them, intending, no doubt, if he had gained this point, to make his attack on that part of the camp of Israel which Balaam now had in his eye, and into which he was to throw the fireballs of his curses. See how restless and unwearied the church's enemies are in their malicious attempts to ruin it; they leave no stone unturned, no project untried, to compass it. O that we were as full of contrivance and resolution in prosecuting good designs for the glory of God! 2. The sacrifices are repeated, new altars are built, a bullock and a ram offered on every altar, and Balak attends his sacrifice as closely as ever, v. 14, 15. Were we thus earnest to obtain the blessing as Balak was to procure a curse (designedly upon Israel, but really upon himself and his people), we should not grudge the return both of the charge and of the labour of religious exercises. 3. Balaam renews his attendance on God, and God meets him the second time, and puts another word into his mouth, not to reverse the former, but to ratify it, v. 16, 17. If God said not to Balaam, *Seek in vain*, much less will he say so to *any of the seed of Jacob*, who shall surely find him, not only as Balaam, their instructor and oracle, but their bountiful rewarder. When Balaam returned Balak was impatient to know what message he had: "*What hath the Lord spoken? Are there any better tidings yet, any hopes of speeding?*" This should be our enquiry when we come to hear the word of God. See Jer. 23:35.

II. A second conversion of the curse into a blessing by the overruling power of God; and this blessing is both larger and stronger than the former, and quite cuts off all hopes of altering it. Balak having been so forward to ask what the Lord had spoken (v. 17), Balaam now addresses himself particularly to him (v. 18): *Rise up, Balak, and hear*. It was a message from God that he had to deliver, and it is required of Balak, though a king, that he attend (*hear and hearken*, with a close application of mind, let not a word slip), and also that he attend with reverence: *Rise up, and hear*. His successor Eglon, when he was to receive a message from God, *rose out of his seat*, Jdg. 3:20.

1. Two things Balaam in this discourse informs Balak of, sorely to his grief and disappointment:—

(1.) That he had no reason to hope that he should ruin Israel.

[1.] It would be to no purpose to attempt to ruin them, and he would deceive himself if he expected it, for three reasons:—  
*First*, Because God is unchangeable: *God is not a man that he should lie*, v. 19. Men change their minds, and therefore break their words; they lie, because they repent. But God does neither. He never changes his mind, and therefore never recalls his promise. Balaam had owned (v. 8) that he could not alter God's counsel, and thence he infers here that God himself would not alter it; such is the imperfection of man, and such the perfection of God. It is impossible for God to lie, Heb. 6:18. And, when

in scripture he is said to *repent*, it is not meant of any change of his mind (for *he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*) but only of the change of his way. This is a great truth, that with God there is no *variableness nor shadow of turning*. Now here, 1. He appeals to Balak himself concerning it: "*Hath he said, and shall he not do it?* Said it in his own purpose, and shall he not perform it in his providence, according to the counsel of his will? Hath he spoken in his word, in his promise, and shall he not make it good? Can we think otherwise of God than that he is unchangeably one with himself and true to his word? All his decrees are unalterable, and all his promises inviolable." 2. He applies this general truth to the case in hand (v. 20): *He hath blessed and I cannot reverse it*, that is, "I cannot prevail with him to reverse it." Israel were of old a blessed people, a seed that the Lord had blessed; the blessing of Abraham came upon them; they were born under the blessing of the covenant, and born to the blessing of Canaan, and therefore they could not be cursed, unless you could suppose that the God of eternal truth should break his word, and become false to himself and his people.

*Secondly*, Because Israel are at present unblamable: *he has not beheld iniquity in Jacob*, v. 21. Not but that there was iniquity in Jacob, and God saw it; but, 1. There was not such a degree of iniquity as might provoke God to abandon them and give them up to ruin. As bad as they were, they were not so bad as this. 2. There was no idolatry among them, which is in a particular manner called iniquity and perverseness; we have found nothing of that kind in Israel since the golden calf, and therefore, though they were in other instances very provoking, yet God would not cast them off. Balaam knew that nothing would separate between them and God but sin. While God saw no reigning sin among them, he would send no destroying curse among them; and therefore, as long as they kept in with God, he despaired of ever doing them any mischief. Note, While we keep from sin we keep from harm. Some give another sense of those words; they read it thus: *He has not beheld wrong offered to Jacob, nor will he see any grievance done to Israel*, that is, "He has not nor will he permit it, or allow it; he will not see Israel injured, but he will right them, and avenge their quarrel." Note, God will not bear to see any injury done to his church and people; for what is done against them he takes as done against himself, and will reckon for it accordingly.

*Thirdly*, Because the power of both was irresistible. He shows Balak that there was no contending with them, it was to no purpose to attempt it; for, 1. They had the presence of God with them: "*The Lord his God is with him* in a particular manner, and not provoked to withdraw from him." 2. They had the joy of that presence, and were always made to triumph in it: *The shout or alarm of a king is among them*. They shout against their enemies, as sure of victory and success, glorying continually in God as their King and conqueror for them. 3. They had had the experience of the benefit of God's presence with them, and his power engaged for them; for God *brought them out of Egypt*, v. 22. The power which had done that could never be restrained, never resisted; and, having begun so gloriously, he would no doubt finish gloriously. 4. While they had God's presence with them they had the strength of a unicorn, able to make head against all that opposed them. See ch. 24:8. Such is the strength which the God of Israel gives unto his people.

[2.] From all this he infers that it was to no purpose for him to think of doing them a mischief by all the arts he could use, v. 23. *First*, He owns himself baffled. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob so as to prevail. The curses of hell can never take place against the blessings of heaven. Not but that attempts of this kind would be made, but they would certainly be

fruitless and ineffectual. Some observe that *Jacob* denotes the church low and afflicted, *Israel* denotes it prosperous and advanced; but be the church high or low, be her friends few or many, let second causes smile or frown, it comes all to one: no weapon formed against it shall prosper. Note, God easily can, and certainly will, baffle and disappoint all the devices and designs of the powers of darkness against his church, so that they shall not prevail to destroy it. *Secondly*, He foresees that this would be remembered in time to come. *According to this time*, that is, with reference to this we are now about, it shall be said concerning Jacob and Israel, and said by them, *What hath God wrought!* What great things hath God done for his people! It shall be said with wonder, joy, and thankfulness, and a challenge to the neighbouring nations to produce any similar instances of the care of their gods for them. Note, The defeating of the designs of the church's enemies ought to be had in everlasting remembrance to the glory of God. *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun*. What Balaam says here concerning the pre-eminence of the God of Israel above all the gods of the Gentiles perhaps Moses refers to when he says (Deu. 32:31), *Their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges*, Balaam particularly. Balak therefore has no hopes of ruining Israel. But,

(2.) Balaam shows him that he had more reason to fear being ruined by them, for they were likely to make bloody work among his neighbours; and, if he and his country escaped, it was not because he was too great for them to meddle with, but because he fell not within their commission v. 24. Behold, and tremble; the people that now have lain for some time closely encamped do but repose themselves for a while like a lion couchant, but shortly they *shall rise up as a great lion*, a lion rampant, that *shall not lie down till he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain*. This seems to point at the victories he foresaw they would obtain over the Canaanites, that they would never lay down their arms till they had made a complete conquest of the land they had now in view; and, when his neighbour's house was on fire, he had reason to think his own in danger.

2. Now what was the issue of this disappointment?

(1.) Balak and Balaam were both of them sick of the cause. [1.] Balak is now willing to have his conjurer silenced. Since he cannot say what he would have him, he wishes him to say nothing: *"Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all*, v. 25. If thou canst not curse them, I beseech thee not to bless them. If thou canst not assist and encourage my forces, yet do not oppose and dispirit them" Note, God can make those that depart from him weary of the *multitude of their counsels*, Isa. 47:13; 57:10.

[2.] Balaam is still willing to own himself overruled, and appeals to what he had said in the beginning of this enterprise (ch. 22:38): *All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do*, v. 26. This sows, *First*, In general, that the way of man is not in himself; there are many devices in man's heart, but God's counsels shall stand. *Secondly*, In particular, that, as no weapon formed against the church shall prosper, so every tongue that rises against her in judgment God will control and condemn, Isa. 54:17.

(2.) Yet they resolve to make another attempt. They think it scorn to be baffled, and therefore pursue the design, though it be only to their further confusion. And now the third time, [1.] They change the place. Balak is at last convinced that it is not Balaam's fault, on whom, before, he had laid the blame, but that really he was under a divine check, and therefore now he hopes to bring him to a place whence God might at least permit him to curse them, v. 27. Probably he and Balaam were the more encouraged thus to repeat their attempt because God had the second time allowed Balaam to go, though he had forbidden

him the first time. Since by repeated trials they had carried that point, they hope in like manner to carry this. Thus because sinners are borne with, and sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, their hearts are the more fully set in them to do evil. The place to which Balak now took Balaam was the top of Peor, the most eminent high place in all his country, where, it is probable, Baal was worshipped, and it was thence called *Baal-peor*. He chose this place with a hope, either, *First*, That it being the residence (as he fancied) of Baal, the god of Moab, Jehovah the God of Israel would not, or could not, come hither to hinder the operation; or, *Secondly*, That, it being a place acceptable to his god, it would be so to the Lord, and there he would be brought into a good humour. Such idle conceits have foolish men of God, and so vain are their imaginations concerning him. Thus the Syrians fancied the Lord to be God of the hills, but not of the valleys (1 Ki. 20:28), as if he were more powerful in one place than he is in every place. [2.] They repeat their sacrifice, seven bullocks and seven rams, upon seven altars, v. 29, 30. Thus do they persevere in their expensive oblations, though they had no promise on which to build their hopes of speeding. Let not us therefore, who have a promise that the vision at the end shall speak and not lie, be discouraged by delays, but continue instant in prayer, and not faint, Lu. 18:1.

## Chapter 24

This chapter continues and concludes the history of the defeat of the counsels of Balak and Balaam against Israel, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts; and as great an instance it is of God's power over the children of men, and his favour towards his own children, as any of the victories recorded in the book of the wars of the Lord. What preparation was made the third time for the cursing of Israel we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we are told, I. What the blessing was into which that intended curse was turned (v. 1-9). II. How Balak dismissed Balaam from his service thereupon (v. 10-13). III. The predictions Balaam left behind him concerning Israel, and some of the neighbouring nations (v. 14, etc.).

### Verses 1-9

The blessing itself which Balaam here pronounces upon Israel is much the same with the two we had in the foregoing chapter; but the introduction to it is different.

I. The method of proceeding here varies much in several instances. 1. Balaam laid aside the enchantments which he had hitherto depended on, used no spells, or charms, or magic arts, finding they did him no service; it was to no purpose to deal with the devil for a curse, when it was plain that God was determined immovably to bless, v. 1. Sooner or later God will convince men of their folly in seeking after lying vanities, which cannot profit. To what purpose should he seek for enchantment? He knew that God was out of the reach of them. 2. He did not now retire into a solitary place as before, but set his face directly towards the wilderness where Israel lay encamped; and, since there is no remedy, but they must be blessed, he will design nothing else, but will submit by compulsion. 3. Now *the Spirit of God came upon him*, that is, the Spirit of prophecy, as upon Saul to prevent him from taking David, 1 Sa. 19:23. He spoke not his own sense, but the language of the Spirit that came upon him. 4. He used a different preface now from what he had used before (v. 3, 4), much like that of David (2 Sa. 23:1-3), yet savouring very much (as some think) of pride and vain-glory, taking all the praise of this prophecy to himself, and magnifying himself as one of the cabinet-council of heaven. Two things he boasts of:—(1.) The favour God did him in making known himself to him. He *heard the words of God, and saw the vision of the Almighty*. God himself had met him and spoken to him (ch. 23:16), and with this he was greatly puffed up. Paul speaks with humility of his visions and revelations (2 Co. 12:1), but Balaam speaks of his with pride. (2.) His own power to receive and bear those revelations. He fell into a trance indeed, as other prophets did, but he had his eyes open. This he mentions twice; but the words in the original are not the same. The *man whose eyes were shut*, some think it may be read so (v. 3-9), but now *having his eyes open*, v. 4. When he attempted to curse Israel, he owns, he was in a mistake, but now he began to see his error, and yet still he remained blinded by covetousness and ambition, those foolish and hurtful lusts. Note, [1.] Those that oppose God and his people will sooner or later be made to see themselves wretchedly deceived. [2.] Many have their eyes open that have not their hearts open, are enlightened, but not sanctified; and that knowledge which puffs men up with pride will but serve to light them to hell, whither many go with their eyes open.

II. Yet the blessing is for substance the same with those before. Several things he admires in Israel:—

1. Their beauty (v. 5): *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* Though they dwelt not in stately palaces, but in coarse and homely tents, and these, no doubt, sadly weather-beaten, yet Balaam sees a beauty in those tents, because of their admirable order, according to their tribes, v. 2. Nothing recommends religion more to the good opinion of those that look upon it at a distance than the unity and harmony of its professors, Ps. 133:1. The amiableness of this people, and the great reputation they should gain among their neighbours, are compared (v. 6) to the beauty and sweetness of fruitful valleys and fine gardens, flourishing trees and fragrant spices. Note, Those whose eyes are open see the saints on the earth to be excellent ones, and their delight is accordingly in them. *The righteous, doubtless, is more excellent than his neighbour.* They are *trees which the Lord has planted*; that is their excellency. The branches of righteousness are the planting of the Lord. See Hos. 14:5-7.

2. Their fruitfulness and increase. This may be intended by those similitudes (v. 6) of the valleys, gardens, and trees, as well as by those expressions (v. 7), *He shall pour the water out of his buckets*; that is, God shall water them with his blessing like rain from heaven, and then his *seed shall be in many waters*. Compare Hos. 2:23, *I will sow her unto me in the earth*. And waters are in scripture put for *peoples, and multitudes, and nations*. This has been fulfilled in the wonderful increase of that nation and their vast multitude even in their dispersion.

3. Their honour and advancement. As the multitude of the people is the honour of the prince, so the magnificence of the prince is the honour of the people; Balaam therefore foretells that their *king shall be higher than Agag*. Agag, it is probable, was the most potent monarch in those parts; Balaam knew of none more considerable than he was; he rose above the rest of his neighbours. But Balaam foretells that Israel's chief commander, who, after Moses, was Joshua, should be more great and honourable than ever Agag was, and make a far better figure in history. Saul, their first king, triumphed over Agag, though, it is said, *he came delicately*.

4. Their power and victory, v. 8. (1.) He looks back upon what they had done, or rather what had been done for them: *God brought them forth out of Egypt*; this he had spoken of before, ch. 23:22. The wonders that attended their deliverance out of Egypt contributed more to their honour, and the terror of their adversaries, than any thing else, Jos. 2:10. He that brought them out of Egypt will not fail to bring them into Canaan, for, *as for God, his work is perfect*. (2.) He looks down upon their present strength. Israel hath, as it were, *the strength of a unicorn*, of which creature it is said (Job 39:9, 10), *Will he be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind him with his band in the furrow?* "No, Israel is too powerful to be checked or held in by my curses or thy armies." (3.) He looks forward to their future conquests: *He shall eat up the nations his enemies*; that is, "he shall not only destroy and devour them as easily and irresistibly as a lion does his prey, but he shall himself be strengthened, and fattened, and enriched, by their spoils."

5. Their courage and security: *He lay down as a lion, as a great lion*, v. 9. Now he does so in the plains of Moab, and asks no leave of the king of Moab, nor is he in fear of him; shortly will he do so in Canaan. When he has torn his prey, he will take his repose, *quiet from the fear of evil*, and bid defiance to all his neighbours; for who shall stir up a sleeping lion? It is observed of lions (as the learned bishop Patrick takes notice here) that they do not retire into places of shelter to sleep, but lie down any

where, knowing that none dares meddle with them: thus secure were Israel in Canaan, chiefly in the days of David and Solomon; and thus is *the righteous bold as a lion* (Prov. 28:1), not to assault others, but to repose themselves, because *God maketh them to dwell in safety*, Ps. 4:8.

6. Their interest, and influence upon their neighbours. Their friends, and those in alliance with them, were happy: *Blessed is he that blesseth thee*; those that do them any kindness will certainly fare the better for it. But their enemies, and those in arms against them, were certainly miserable: *Cursed is he that curseth thee*; those that do them any injury do it at their peril; for God takes what is done to them, whether good or evil, as done to himself. Thus he confirms the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and speaks as if *therefore* he did at this time bless Israel, and not curse them, because he desired to share in the blessing of Israel's friends and dreaded the curse on Israel's enemies.

#### **Verses 10-14**

We have here the conclusion of this vain attempt to curse Israel, and the total abandonment of it. 1. Balak made the worst of it. He broke out into a rage against Balaam (v. 10), expressed both in words and gesture the highest degree of vexation at the disappointment; he smote his hands together, for indignation, to see all his measures thus broken, and his project baffled. He charged Balaam with putting upon him the basest affront and cheat imaginable: *"I called thee to curse my enemies, and thou hast shown thyself in league with them, and in their interests, for thou hast blessed them these three times, though, by appointing the altars to be built and sacrifices to be offered, thou madest me believe thou wouldst certainly curse them."* Hereupon he forbade him his presence, expelled him his country, upbraided him with the preferments he had designed to bestow upon him, but now would not (v. 11): *"The Lord hath kept thee back from honour.* See what thou gettest by pleasing the Lord, instead of pleasing me; thou hast hindered thy preferment by it." Thus those who are any way losers by their duty are commonly upbraided with it, as fools, for preferring it before their interest in the world. Whereas, if Balaam had been voluntary and sincere in his adherence to the word of the Lord, though he lost the honour Balak designed him by it, God would have made that loss up to him abundantly to his advantage. 2. Balaam made the best of it. (1.) He endeavours to excuse the disappointment. And a very good excuse he has for it, that God restrained him from saying what he would have said, and constrained him to say what he would not; and that this was what Balak ought not to be displeased at, not only because he could not help it, but because he had told Balak before what he must depend upon, v. 12, 13. Balak could not say that he had cheated him, since he had given him fair notice of the check he found himself under. (2.) He endeavours to atone for it, v. 14. Though he cannot do what Balak would have him do, yet, [1.] He will gratify his curiosity with some predictions concerning the nations about him. It is natural to us to be pleased with prophecy, and with this he hopes to pacify the angry prince. [2.] He will satisfy him with an assurance that, whatever this formidable people should do to his people, it should not be till the latter days; so that he, for his part, needed not to fear any mischief or molestation from them; the *vision was for a great while to come*, but in his days there should be peace. [3.] He will put him into a method of doing Israel a mischief without the ceremonies of enchantment and execration. This seems to be implied in that word: *I will advertise thee*; for it properly signifies, *I will counsel thee*. What the counsel was is not set down here, because it was given privately, but we are told

afterwards what it was, ch. 31:16. He counselled him to entice the Israelites to idolatry, Rev. 2:14. Since he could not have leave from God to curse them, he puts him in a way of getting help from the devil to tempt them. *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*—*If I cannot move heaven, I will solicit hell.*

### Verses 15-25

The office of prophets was both to bless and to prophesy in the name of the Lord. Balaam, as a prophet, per force had blessed Israel; here he foretels future events.

I. His preface is much the same as that, v. 3, 4. He personates a true prophet admirably well, God permitting and directing him to do so, because, whatever he was, the prophecy itself was a true prophecy. He boasts, 1. That his *eyes are open* (v. 15), for prophets were *in old time called seers* (1 Sa. 9:9), because they must speak what they had seen, and therefore, before they opened their lips, it was necessary that they should have their eyes open. 2. That he has *heard the words of God*, which many do that do not heed them, nor hear God in them. 3. That he *knew the knowledge of the Most High*; this is added here. A man may be full of the knowledge of God and yet utterly destitute of the grace of God, may receive the truth in the light of it and yet be a stranger to the love of it. 4. That *he saw the vision of the Almighty*, but not so as to be *changed into the same image*. He calls God the *Most High*, and the *Almighty*; no man could speak more honourably of him, nor seem to put a greater value upon his acquaintance with him, and yet he had no true fear of him, love to him, or faith in him, so far may a man go towards heaven, and yet come short.

II. Here is his prophecy concerning him that should be the crown and glory of his people Israel, who is, 1. David in the type, who *not now*, not quickly, but in process of time, should *smite the corners of Moab*. (v. 17), and take possession of Mount Seir, and under whom the forces of Israel should *do valiantly*, v. 18. This was fulfilled when David smote Moab, and *measured them with a line*, so that *the Moabites became David's servants*, 2 Sa. 8:2. And at the same time the Edomites likewise were brought into obedience to Israel, v. 14. But, 2. Our Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah, is chiefly pointed at in the antitype, and of him it is an illustrious prophecy; it was the will of God that notice should thus be given of his coming, a great while before, not only to the people of the Jews, but to other nations, because his gospel and kingdom were to extend themselves so far beyond the borders of the land of Israel. It is here foretold, (1.) That while: *"I shall see him, but not now; I do see him in vision, but at a very great distance, through the interposing space of 1500 years at least."* Or understand it thus:—Balaam, a wicked man, shall see Christ, but shall not see him nigh, nor see him as Job, who saw him *as his Redeemer*, and saw him for himself, Job 19:25, 27. 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*. (2.) That he shall come out of Jacob, and Israel, as a star and a sceptre, the former denoting his glory and lustre, and the *bright and morning star*, the latter his power and authority; it is *he that shall have dominion*. Perhaps this prophecy of Balaam (one of the children of the east) concerning a star that should arise out of Jacob, as the indication of a sceptre arising in Israel, being preserved by a tradition of that country, gave occasion to the wise men, who were of the east too, upon the sight of an unusual star over the land of Judea, to enquire for him that was *born king of the Jews*, Mt. 2:2. (3.) That his kingdom shall be universal, and victorious over all opposition, which was typified by David's victories over Moab and

Edom. But the Messiah shall destroy, or, as some read it, *shall rule over, all the children of Seth.* (v. 17), that is, all the children of men, who descend from Seth, the son of Adam, the descendants of the rest of Adam's sons being cut off by the deluge. Christ shall be king, not only of Jacob and Israel, but of all the world; so that all the children of Seth shall be either governed by his golden sceptre or dashed in pieces by his iron rod. He shall set up a universal rule, authority, and power, of his own, and shall put down all opposing rule, 1 Co. 15:24. He shall *unwall all the children of Seth;* so some read it. He shall take down all their defences and carnal confidences, so that they shall either admit his government or lie open to his judgments. (4.) That his Israel shall do valiantly; the subjects of Christ, animated by his might, shall maintain a spiritual war with the powers of darkness, and be more than conquerors. *The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits,* Dan. 11:32.

III. Here is his prophecy concerning the Amalekites and Kenites, part of whose country, it is probable, he had now in view. 1. The Amalekites were now the *chief of the nations* (v. 20), therefore Agag was spoken of (v. 7) as an eminent prince, and they were the first that engaged Israel when they came out of Egypt; but the time will come when that nation, as great as it looks now, will be totally ruined and rooted out: *His latter end shall be that he perish for ever.* Here Balaam confirms that doom of Amalek which Moses had read (Ex. 17:14, 16), where God had sworn that he would have *perpetual war with Amalek.* Note, Those whom God is at war with will certainly perish for ever; for when God judges he will overcome. 2. The Kenites were now the securest of the nations; their situation was such as that nature was their engineer, and had strongly fortified them: *"Thou puttest thy nest (like the eagle) in a rock,* v. 21. Thou thinkest thyself safe, and yet the *Kenites shall be wasted* (v. 22) and gradually brought to decay, till they be carried away captive by the Assyrians," which was done at the captivity of the ten tribes. Note, Bodies politic, like natural bodies, though of the strongest constitutions, will gradually decay, and come to ruin at last; even a nest in a rock will be no perpetual security.

IV. Here is a prophecy that looks as far forward as the Greeks and Romans, for theirs is supposed to be meant by the *coast of Chittim,* v. 24.

1. The introduction to this parable; this article of his prophecy is very observable (v. 23): *Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?* Here he acknowledges all the revolutions of states and kingdoms to be the Lord's doing: *God doeth this;* whoever are the instruments, he is the supreme director. But he speaks mournfully concerning them, and has a very melancholy prospect of these events: *Who shall live?* Either, (1.) These events are so distant, and so far off to come, that it is hard to say *who shall live till they come;* but, whoever shall live to see them, there will be amazing turns. Or, (2.) They will be so dismal, and make such desolations, that scarcely any will escape or be left alive; who shall live when death rides in triumph? Rev. 6:8. Those that live then will be as brands plucked out of the fire, and will have their lives given them as a prey. God fit us for the worst of times!

2. The prophecy itself is observable. Both Greece and Italy lie much upon the sea, and therefore their armies were sent forth mostly in ships. Now he seems here to foretell, (2.) That the forces of the Grecians should humble and bring down the Assyrians, who were united with the Persians, which was fulfilled when the eastern country was overcome, or overrun rather, by Alexander. (2.) That theirs and the Roman forces should afflict the Hebrews, or Jews, who were called *the children of Eber;* this was fulfilled in part when the Grecian empire was oppressive to the Jewish nation, but chiefly when the Roman empire

ruined it and put a period to it. But, (3.) That Chittim, that is, the Roman empire, in which the Grecian was at length swallowed up, should itself perish for ever, when the stone cut out of the mountain without hands shall consume all these kingdoms, and particularly the *feet of iron and clay*, Dan. 2:34. Thus (says Dr. Lightfoot) Balaam, instead of cursing the church, curses Amalek the first, and Rome the last, enemy of the church. And *so let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!*

## Chapter 25

Israel, having escaped the curse of Balaam, here sustains a great deal of damage and reproach by the counsel of Balaam, who, it seems, before he left Balak, put him into a more effectual way than that which Balak thought of to separate between the Israelites and their God. "The Lord will not be prevailed with by Balaam's charms to ruin them; try if they will not be prevailed with by the charms of the daughters of Moab to ruin themselves." None are more fatally bewitched than those that are bewitched by their own lusts. Here is, I. The sin of Israel; they were enticed by the daughters of Moab both to whoredom and to idolatry (v. 1-3). II. The punishment of this sin by the hand of the magistrate (v. 4, 5) and by the immediate hand of God (v. 9). III. The pious zeal of Phinehas in slaying Zimri and Cozbi, two impudent sinners (v. 6, 8, 14, 15). IV. God's commendation of the zeal of Phinehas (v. 10-13). V. Enmity put between the Israelites and the Midianites, their tempters, as at first between the woman and the serpent (v. 16, etc.).

### Verses 1-5

Here is, I. The sin of Israel, to which they were enticed by the daughters of Moab and Midian; they were guilty both of corporal and spiritual whoredoms, for *Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor*, v. 3. Not all, nor the most, but very many, were taken in this snare. Now concerning this observe, 1. That Balak, by the advice of Balaam, *cast this stumbling-block before the children of Israel*, Rev. 2:14. Note, Those are our worst enemies that draw us to sin, for that is the greatest mischief any man can do us. If Balak had drawn out his armed men against them to fight them, Israel had bravely resisted, and no doubt had been more than conquerors; but now that he sends his beautiful women among them, and invites them to his idolatrous feasts, the Israelites basely yield, and are shamefully overcome: those are smitten with this harlots that could not be smitten with his sword. Note, We are more endangered by the charms of a smiling world than by the terrors of a frowning world. 2. That the daughters of Moab were their tempters and conquerors. Ever since Eve was first in the transgression the fairer sex, though the weaker, has been a snare to many; yea strong men have been wounded and slain by the lips of the strange woman (Prov. 7:26), witness Solomon, whose wives were shares and nets to him Eccl. 7:26. 3. That whoredom and idolatry went together. They first defiled and debauched their consciences, by committing lewdness with the women, and then were easily drawn, in complaisance to them, and in contempt of the God of Israel, to bow down to their idols. And they were more likely to do so if, as it is commonly supposed, and seems probable by the joining of them together, the uncleanness committed was a part of the worship and service performed to Baal-peor. Those that have broken the fences of modesty will never be held by the bonds of piety, and those that have dishonoured themselves by fleshly lusts will not scruple to dishonour God by idolatrous worships, and for this they are justly given up yet further to vile affections. 4. That by eating of the idolatrous sacrifices they *joined themselves to Baal-peor* to whom they were offered, which the apostle urges as a reason why Christians should not *eat things offered to idols*, because thereby they had fellowship with the devils to whom they were offered, 1 Co. 10:20. It is called *eating the sacrifices of the dead* (Ps. 106:28), not only because the idol itself was a dead thing, but because the person represented by it was some great hero, who since his death was deified, as saints in the Roman church are canonized. 5. It was great

aggravation of the sin that *Israel abode in Shittim*, where they had the land of Canaan in view, and were just ready to enter and take possession of it. It was the highest degree of treachery and ingratitude to be false to their God, whom they had found so faithful to them, and to eat of idol-sacrifices when they were ready to be feasted so richly on God's favours.

II. God's just displeasure against them for this sin. Israel's whoredoms did that which all Balaam's enchantments could not do, they set God against them; now he was *turned to be their enemy, and fought against them*. So many of the people, nay, so many of the princes, were guilty, that the sin became national, and for it God was wroth with the whole congregation. 1. A plague immediately broke out, for we read of the staying of it (v. 8), and of the number that died of it (v. 9), but no mention of the beginning of it, which therefore must be implied in those words (v. 3), *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel*. It is said expressly (Ps. 106:29), *The plague broke in*. Note, Epidemical diseases are the fruits of God's anger, and the just punishments of epidemical sins; one infection follows the other. The plague, no doubt, fastened on those that were most guilty, who were soon made to pay dearly for their forbidden pleasures; and though now God does not always plague such sinners, as he did here, yet that word of God will be fulfilled, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*, 1 Co. 3:17. 2. The ringleaders are ordered to be put to death by the hand of public justice, which will be the only way to stay the plague (v. 4): *Take the heads of the people* (that is, of that part of the people that went out of the camp of Israel into the country of Moab, to join in their idolatries)—*take them and hang them up before the sun*, as sacrifices to God's justice, and for a terror to the rest of the people. The judges must first order them to be *slain with the sword* (v. 5), and their dead bodies must be hanged up, that the stupid Israelites, seeing their leaders and princes so severely punished for their whoredom and idolatry, without any regard to their quality, might be possessed with a sense of the evil of the sin and the terror of God's wrath against them. Ringleaders in sin ought to be made examples of justice.

### **Verses 6-15**

Here is a remarkable contest between wickedness and righteousness, which shall be most bold and resolute; and righteousness carries the day, as no doubt it will at last.

I. Never was vice more daring than it was in Zimri, *a prince of a chief house* in the tribe of Simeon. Such a degree of impudence in wickedness had he arrived at that he publicly appeared leading a Midianitish harlot (and a harlot of quality too like himself, *a daughter of a chief house in Midian*) in the sight of Moses, and all the good people of Israel. He did not think it enough to go out with his harlot to worship the gods of Moab, but, when he had done that, he brought her with him to dishonour the God of Israel. He not only owned her publicly as his friend, and higher in his favour than any of the daughters of Israel, but openly went with her *into the tent*, v. 8. The word signifies such a booth or place of retirement as was designed and fitted up for lewdness. Thus he *declared his sin as Sodom*, as was so far from blushing for it that he rather prided himself in it, and gloried in his shame. All the circumstances concurred to make it exceedingly sinful, exceedingly shameful. 1. It was an affront to the justice of the nation, and bade defiance to that. The judges were ordered to put the criminals to death, but he thought himself too great for them to meddle with, and, in effect, bade them touch him if they durst. He had certainly cast off all fear of God who stood in no awe of the powers which he had ordained to be *a terror to evil-doers*. 2. It was an affront to the

religion of the nation, and put a contempt upon that. Moses, and the main body of the congregation, who kept their integrity, *were weeping at the door of the tabernacle*, lamenting the sin committed and deprecating the plague begun; they were *sanctifying a fast* in a solemn assembly, weeping *between the porch and the altar*, to turn away the wrath of God from the congregation. Then comes Zimri among them, with his harlot in his hand, to banter them, and, in effect, to tell them that he was resolved to fill the measure of sin as fast as they emptied it.

II. Never was virtue more daring than it was in Phinehas. Being aware of the insolence of Zimri, which it is probable, all the congregation took notice of, in a holy indignation at the offenders he rises up from his prayers, takes his sword or half-pike, follows those impudent sinners into their tent, and stabs them both, v. 7, 8. It is not at all difficult to justify Phinehas in what he did; for, being now heir-apparent to the high-priesthood, no doubt he was one of those judges of Israel whom Moses had ordered, by the divine appointment, to slay all those whom they knew to have joined themselves to Baal-peor, so that this gives no countenance at all to private persons, under pretence of zeal against sin, to put offenders to death, who ought to be prosecuted by due course of law. The civil magistrate is the avenger, to *execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*, and no private person may take his work out of his hand. Two ways God testified his acceptance of the pious zeal of Phinehas:-1. He immediately put a stop to the plague, v. 8. Their weeping and praying prevailed not till this piece of necessary justice was done. If magistrates do not take care to punish sin, God will; but their justice will be the best prevention of his judgment, as in the case of Achan, Jos. 7:13. 2. He put an honour upon Phinehas. Though he did no more than it was his duty to do as a judge, yet because he did it with extraordinary zeal against sin, and for the honour of God and Israel, and did it when the other judges, out of respect to Zimri's character as a prince, were afraid, and declined doing it, therefore God showed himself particularly well pleased with him, and it *was counted to him for righteousness*, Ps. 106:31. There is nothing lost by venturing for God. If Zimri's relations bore him a grudge for it, and his friends might censure him as indiscreet in this violent and hasty execution, what needed he care, while God accepted him? In a good thing we should be zealously affected. (1.) Phinehas, upon this occasion, though a young man, is pronounced his country's patriot and best friend, v. 11. He has *turned away my wrath from the children of Israel*. So much does God delight in showing mercy that he is well pleased with those that are instrumental in turning away his wrath. This is the best service we can do to our people; and we may contribute something towards it by our prayers, and by our endeavours in our places to *bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end*. (2.) The priesthood is entailed by covenant upon his family. It was designed him before, but now it was confirmed to him, and, which added much to the comfort and honour of it, it was made the recompence of his pious zeal, v. 12, 13. It is here called *an everlasting priesthood*, because it should continue to the period of the Old-Testament dispensation, and should then have its perfection and perpetuity in the unchangeable priesthood of Christ, who is *consecrated for evermore*. By the *covenant of peace* given him, some understand in general a promise of long life and prosperity, and all good; it seems rather to be meant particularly of the covenant of priesthood, for that is called the *covenant of life and peace* (Mal. 2:5), and was made for the preservation of peace between God and his people. Observe how the reward answered the service. By executing justice he had *made an atonement for the children of Israel* (v. 13), and therefore he and his shall henceforward be employed in making atonement by sacrifice. He *was*

*zealous for his God*, and therefore he shall have the covenant of *an everlasting priesthood*. Note, It is requisite that ministers should be not only for God, but zealous for God. It is required of them that they do more than others for the support and advancement of the interests of God's kingdom among men.

**Verses 16-18**

God had punished the Israelites for their sin with a plague; as a Father he corrected his own children with a rod. But we read not that any of the Midianites died of the plague; God took another course with them, and punished them with the sword of an enemy, not with the rod of a father. 1. Moses, though the meekest man, and far from a spirit of revenge, is ordered to *vex the Midianites and smite them*, v. 17. Note, We must set ourselves against that, whatever it is, which is an occasion of sin to us, though it be a right eye or a right hand that thus offends us, Mt. 5:29, 30. This is that holy indignation and revenge which godly sorrow worketh, 2 Co. 7:11. 2. The reason given for the meditating of this revenge is because they *vex you with their wiles*, v. 18. Note, Whatever draws us to sin should be a vexation to us, as a thorn in the flesh. The mischief which the Midianites did to Israel by enticing them to whoredom must be remembered and punished with as much severity as that which the Amalekites did in fighting with them when they came out of Egypt, Ex. 17:14. God will certainly reckon with those that do the devil's work in tempting men to sin. See further orders given in this matter, ch. 31:2.

## Chapter 26

This book is called Numbers, from the numberings of the children of Israel, of which it gives an account. Once they were numbered at Mount Sinai, in the first year after they came out of Egypt, which we had an account of, ch. 1 and 2. And now a second time they were numbered in the plains of Moab, just before they entered Canaan, and of this we have an account in this chapter. We have, I. Orders given for the doing of it (v. 1-4). II. A register of the families and numbers of each tribe (v. 5-50), and the sum total (v. 51). III. Direction given to divide the land among them (v. 52-56). IV. The families and numbers of the Levites by themselves (v. 57-62). V. Notice taken of the fulfilling of the threatening in the death of all those that were first numbered (v. 63-65), and to this there seems to have been a special regard in the taking and keeping of this account.

### Verses 1-4

Observe here, 1. That Moses did not number the people but when God commanded him. David in his time did it without a command, and paid dearly for it. God was Israel's king, and he would not have this act of authority done but by his express orders. Moses, perhaps, by this time, had heard of the blessing with which Balaam was constrained, sorely against his will, to bless Israel, and particularly the notice he took of their numbers; and he was sufficiently pleased with that general testimony borne to this instance of their strength and honour by an adversary, though he knew not their numbers exactly, till God now appointed him to take the sum of them. 2. Eleazar was joined in commission with him, as Aaron had been before, by which God honoured Eleazar before the elders of his people, and confirmed his succession. 3. It was presently after the plague that this account was ordered to be taken, to show that though God had in justice contended with them by that sweeping pestilence, yet he had not made a full end, nor would he utterly cast them off. God's Israel shall not be ruined, though it be severely rebuked. 4. They were now to go by the same rule that they had gone by in the former numbering, counting those only that were able to go forth to war, for this was the service now before them.

### Verses 5-51

This is the register of the tribes as they were now enrolled, in the same order that they were numbered in ch. 1. Observe, I. The account that is here kept of the families of each tribe, which must not be understood of such as we call families, those that live in a house together, but such as were the descendants of the several sons of the patriarchs, by whose names, in honour of them, their posterity distinguished themselves and one another. The families of the twelve tribes are thus numbered:—Of Dan but one, for Dan had but one son, and yet that tribe was the most numerous of all except Judah, v. 42, 43. Its beginning was small, but its latter end greatly increased. Zebulun was divided into three families, Ephraim into four, Issachar into four, Naphtali into four, and Reuben into four; Judah, Simeon, and Asher, had five families apiece, Gad and Benjamin seven apiece, and Manasseh eight. Benjamin brought ten sons into Egypt (Gen. 46:21), but three of them, it seems either died childless or their families were extinct, for here we find seven only of those names preserved, and that whole tribe none of the most numerous; for Providence, in the building up of families and nations, does not tie itself to probabilities. *The barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children has waxed feeble*, 1 Sa. 2:5.

II. The numbers of each tribe. And here our best entertainment will be to compare these numbers with those when they were numbered at Mount Sinai. The sum total was nearly the same; they were now 1820 fewer than they were then; yet seven of the tribes had increased in number. Judah had increased 1900, Issachar 9900, Zebulun 3100, Manasseh 20,500, Benjamin 10,200, Dan 1700, and Asher 11,900. But the other five had decreased more than to balance that increase. Reuben had decreased 2770, Simeon 37,100, Gad 5150, Ephraim 8000, and Naphtali 8000. In this account we may observe, 1. that all the three tribes that were encamped under the standard of Judah, who was the ancestor of Christ, had increased, for his church shall be edified and multiplied. 2. That none of the tribes had increased so much as that of Manasseh, which in the former account was the smallest of all the tribes, only 32,200, while here it is one of the most considerable; and that of his brother Ephraim, which there was numerous, is here one of the least. Jacob had crossed hands upon their heads, and had preferred Ephraim before Manasseh, which perhaps the Ephraimites had prided themselves too much in, and had trampled upon their brethren the Manassites; but, when the Lord saw that Manasseh was despised, he thus multiplied him exceedingly, for it is his glory to help the weakest, and raise up those that are cast down. 3. That none of the tribes decreased so much as Simeon did; from 59,300, it such to 22,200, little more than a third part of what it was. One whole family of that tribe (namely Ohad, mentioned Ex. 6:15) was extinct in the wilderness. Hence Simeon is not mentioned in Moses's blessing (Deu. 33), and the lot of that tribe in Canaan was inconsiderable, only a canton out of Judah's lot, Jos. 19:9. Some conjecture that most of those 24,000 who were cut off by the plague for the iniquity of Peor were of that tribe; for Zimri, who was a ringleader in that iniquity, was a prince of that tribe, many of whom therefore were influenced by his example to *follow his pernicious ways*.

III. In the account of the tribe of Reuben mention is made of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, who were of that tribe, in confederacy with Korah a Levite, v. 9–11. Though the story had been largely related but a few chapters before, yet here it comes in again, as fit to be had in remembrance and thought of by posterity, whenever they looked into their pedigree and pleased themselves with the antiquity of their families and the glory of their ancestors, that they might call themselves a seed of evil doers. Two things are here said of them:—1. That they had been *famous in the congregation*, v. 9. Probably they were remarkable for their ingenuity, activity, and fitness for business:—*That Dathan and Abiram* that might have been advanced in due time under God and Moses; but their ambitious spirits put them upon striving against God and Moses, and when they quarrelled with the one they quarrelled with the other. And what was the issue? 2. Those that might have been famous were made infamous: they *became a sign*, v. 10. They were made monuments of divine justice; God, in their ruin, showed himself glorious in holiness, and so they were set up for a warning to all others, in all ages, to take heed of treading in the steps of their pride and rebellion. Notice is here taken of the preservation of the *children of Korah* (v. 11); they *died not*, as the children of Dathan and Abiram did, doubtless because they kept themselves pure from the infection, and would not join, no, not with their own father, in rebellion. If we partake not of the sins of sinners, we shall not partake of their plagues. These sons of Korah were afterwards, in their posterity, eminently serviceable to the church, being employed by David as singers in the house of the Lord; hence many psalms are said to be for *the sons of Korah*: and perhaps they were made to bear his name so long after, rather than the name of any other of their ancestors, for warning to themselves, and as an instance of the power of God, which

brought those choice fruits even out of that bitter root. The children of families that have been stigmatized should endeavour, by their eminent virtues, to roll away the reproach of their fathers.

#### **Verses 52-56**

If any ask why such a particular account is kept of the tribes, and families, and numbers, of the people of Israel, here is an answer for them; as they were multiplied, so they were portioned, not by common providence, but by promise; and, for the support of the honour of divine revelation, God will have the fulfilling of the promise taken notice of both in their increase and in their inheritance. When Moses had numbered the people God did not say, *By these shall the land be conquered*; but, taking that for granted, he tells him, *Unto these shall the land be divided*. "These that are now registered as the sons of Israel shall be admitted (as it were by copy of court-roll) heirs of the land of Canaan." Now, in the distributing, or quartering, of these tribes, 1. The general rule of equity is here prescribed to Moses, that to many he should give more, and to few he should give less (v. 54); yet, alas! *he* was so far from giving any to others that he must not have any himself, but this direction given to him was intended for Joshua his successor. 2. The application of this general rule was to be determined *by lot* (v. 55); notwithstanding it seems thus to be left to the prudence of their prince, yet the matter must be finally reserved to the providence of their God, in which they must all acquiesce, how much soever it contradicted their policies or inclination: *According to the lot shall the possession be divided*. As the God of nations, so the God of Israel in particular, reserves it to himself to *appoint the bounds of our habitation*. And thus Christ, our Joshua, when he was urged to appoint one of his disciples *to his right hand*, another *to his left* in his kingdom, acknowledged the sovereignty of his Father in the disposal: *It is not mine to give*. Joshua must not dispose of inheritances in Canaan according to his own mind. *But it shall be given to those for whom it is prepared of my Father*.

#### **Verses 57-62**

Levi was God's tribe, a tribe that was to have no inheritance with the rest in the land of Canaan, and therefore was not numbered with the rest, but by itself; so it had been numbered in the beginning of this book at Mount Sinai, and therefore came not under the sentence passed upon all that were then numbered, that none of them should enter Canaan but Caleb and Joshua; for of the Levites that were not numbered with them, nor were to go forth to war, Eleazar and Ithamar, and perhaps others who were above twenty years old then (as appears, ch. 4:16, 28), entered Canaan; and yet this tribe, now at its second numbering, had increased but 1000, and was still one of the smallest tribes. Mention is made here of the death of Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire, as before of the sin and punishment of Korah, because *these things happened to them for ensamples*.

#### **Verses 63-65**

That which is observable in this conclusion of the account is the execution of the sentence passed upon the murmurers (ch. 14:29), that not one of those who *were numbered from twenty years old and upwards* (and that the Levites were not, but either from a month old or from thirty years old to fifty) should enter Canaan, except Caleb and Joshua. In the muster now made particular directions, no doubt, were given to those of each tribe that were employed in taking the account, to compare these rolls with the former, and to observe whether there were any now left of those that were numbered at Mount Sinai, and it appeared that there was not one man numbered now that was numbered then except Caleb and Joshua, v. 64, 65. Herein

appeared, 1. The righteousness of God, and his faithfulness to his threatenings, when once the *decree has gone forth*. He *swore in his wrath*, and what he had sworn he performed. Better all those carcasses, had they been ten times as many, should fall to the ground, than the word of God. Though the rising generation was mixed with the, and many of the guilty and condemned criminals long survived the sentence, even to the last year of the forty, yet they were cut off by some means or other before this muster was made. Those whom God has condemned cannot escape either by losing themselves in a crowd or by the delay of execution. 2. The goodness of God to this people, notwithstanding their provocations. Though that murmuring race was cut off, yet God raised up another generation, which was as numerous as they, that, though they perished, yet the name of Israel might not be cut off, lest the inheritance of the promise should be lost for want of heirs. And, though the number fell a little short what it was at Mount Sinai, yet those now numbered had this advantage, that they were all middle-aged men, between twenty and sixty, in the prime of their time for service; and during the thirty-eight years of their wandering and wasting in the wilderness they had an opportunity of acquainting themselves with the laws and ordinances of God, having no business, civil or military, to divert them from those sacred studies, and having Moses and Aaron to instruct them, and God's good Spirit, Neh. 9:20. 3. The truth of God, in performing his promise made to Caleb and Joshua. They were to be preserved from falling in this common ruin, and they were so. The arrows of death, though they fly in the dark, do not fly at random, even when they fly thickest, but are directed to the mark intended, and no other. All that are written among the living shall have their lives given them for a prey, in the most dangerous times. Thousands may fall on their right hand, and ten thousands on their left, but they shall escape.

## Chapter 27

Here is, I. The case of Zelophehad's daughters determined (v. 1–11). II. Notice given to Moses of his death approaching (v. 12–14). III. Provision made of a successor in the government, 1. By the prayer of Moses (v. 15–17). 2. By the appointment of God (v. 18, etc.).

### Verses 1-11

Mention is made of the case of these daughters of Zelophehad in the chapter before, v. 33. It should seem, by the particular notice taken of it, that it was a singular case, and that the like did not at this time occur in all Israel, that the head of a family had no sons, but daughters only. Their case is again debated (ch. 36) upon another article of it; and, according to the judgments given in their case, we find them put in possession, Jos. 17:3, 4. One would suppose that their personal character was such as added weight to their case, and caused it to be so often taken notice of.

Here is, I. Their case stated by themselves, and their petition upon it presented to the highest court of judicature, which consisted of Moses as king, the princes as lords, and the congregation, or elders of the people who were chose their representatives, as the commons, v. 2. This august assembly sat near the *door of the tabernacle*, that in difficult cases they might consult the oracle. To them these young ladies made their application; for it is the duty of magistrates to *defend the fatherless*, Ps. 82:3. We find not that they had any advocate to speak for them, but they managed their own cause ingeniously enough, which they could do the better because it was plain and honest, and spoke for itself. Now observe,

1. What it is they petition for: That they might have a possession in the land of *Canaan, among the brethren of their father*, v. 4. What God had said to Moses (ch. 26:53) he had faithfully made known to the people, that the land of Canaan was to be divided among those that were now numbered; these daughters knew that they were not numbered, and therefore by this rule must expect no inheritance, and the family of their father must be looked upon as extinct, and written childless, though he had all these daughters: this they thought hard, and therefore prayed to be admitted heirs to their father, and to have an inheritance in his right. If they had had a brother, they would not have applied to Moses (as one did to Christ, Lu. 12:13) for an order to inherit with him. But, having no brother, they beg for a possession. Herein they discovered, (1.) A strong faith in the power and promise of God concerning the giving of the land of Canaan to Israel. Though it was yet unconquered, untouched, and in the full possession of the natives, yet they petition for their share in it as if it were all their own already. See Ps. 60:6, 7, *God has spoken in his holiness, and the Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine*. (2.) An earnest desire of a place and name in the land of promise, which was a type of heaven; and if they had, as some think, an eye to that, and by this claim laid hold on eternal life, they were five wise virgins indeed; and their example should quicken us with all possible diligence to make sure our title to the heavenly inheritance, in the disposal of which, by the covenant of grace, no difference is made between male and female, Gal. 3:28. (3.) A true respect and honour for their father, whose name was dear and precious to them now that he was gone, and they were therefore solicitous that it should not be *done away from among his family*. There is a debt which children owe to the memory of their parents, required by the fifth commandment: *Honour thy father and mother*.

2. What their plea is: That their father did not die under any attainder which might be thought to have corrupted his blood and forfeited his estate, but he *died in his own sin* (v. 3), not engaged in any mutiny or rebellion against Moses, particularly not in that of Korah and his company, nor in any way concerned in the sins of others, but chargeable only with the common iniquities of mankind, for which to his own Master he was to stand or fall, but laid not himself open to any judicial process before Moses and the princes. He was never convicted of any thing that might be a bar to his children's claim. It is a comfort to parents, when they come to die, if, though they smart themselves for their own sin, yet they are not conscious to themselves of any of those iniquities which God visits upon the children.

II. Their case determined by the divine oracle. Moses did not presume to give judgment himself, because, though their pretensions seemed just and reasonable, yet his express orders were to divide the land among those that were numbered, who were the males only; he therefore *brings their cause before the Lord*, and waits for his decision (v. 5), and God himself gives the judgment upon it. He takes cognizance of the affairs, not only of nations, but of private families, and orders them in judgment, according to the counsel of his own will. 1. The petition is granted (v. 7): *They speak right, give them a possession*. Those that seek an inheritance in the land of promise shall have what they seek, and other things shall be added to them. These are claims which God will countenance and crown. 2. The point is settled for all future occasions. These daughters of Zelophehad consulted, not only their own comfort and the credit of their family, but the honour and happiness of their sex likewise; for on this particular occasion a general law was made that, in case a man had no son, his estate should go to his daughters (v. 8); not to the eldest, as the eldest son, but to them all in copartnership, share and share alike. Those that in such a case deprive their daughters of their right, purely to keep up the name of their family, unless a valuable consideration be allowed them, may make the entail of their lands surer than the entail of a blessing with them. Further directions are given for the disposal of inheritances, v. 9–11. "If a man have no issue at all, his estate shall go to his brethren; if no brethren, then to his father's brethren; and, if there be no such, then to his next kinsman." With this the rules of our law exactly agree: and though the Jewish doctors here will have it understood that if a man have no children his estate shall go to his father, if living, before his brethren, yet there is nothing of that in the law, and our common law has an express rule against it, That an estate cannot ascend lineally; so that if a person purchase lands in fee-simple, and die without issue in the life-time of his father, his father cannot be his heir. See how God makes heirs, and in his disposal we must acquiesce.

#### **Verses 12-14**

Here, 1. God tells Moses of his fault, his speaking unadvisedly with his lips at the waters of strife, where he did not express, so carefully as he ought to have done, a regard to the honour both of God and Israel, v. 14. Though Moses was a servant of the Lord, a faithful servant, yet once he *rebelled against God's commandment*, and failed in his duty; and though a very honourable servant, and highly favoured, yet he shall hear of his miscarriage, and all the world shall hear of it too, again and again; for God will show his displeasure against sin, even in those that are nearest and dearest to him. Those that are *in reputation for wisdom and honour* have need to be constantly careful of their words and ways, lest at any time they say or do that which may be a diminution to their comfort, or to their credit, or both, a great while after. 2. He tells Moses of his death.

His death was the punishment of his sin, and yet notice is given him of it in such a manner as might best serve to sweeten and mollify the sentence, and reconcile him to it. (1.) Moses must die, but he shall first have the satisfaction of seeing the land of promise, v. 12. God did not intend with this sight of Canaan to tantalize him, or upbraid him with his folly in doing that which cut him short of it, nor had it any impression of that kind upon him, but God appointed it and Moses accepted it as a favour, his sight (we have reason to think) being wonderfully strengthened and enlarged to take such a full and distinct view of it as did abundantly gratify his innocent curiosity. This sight of Canaan signified his believing prospect of the better country, that is, the heavenly, which is very comfortable to dying saints. (2.) Moses must die, but death does not *cut him off*; it only gathers him to his people, brings him to rest with the holy patriarchs that had gone before him. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, were *his people*, the people of his choice and love, and to them death gathered him. (3.) Moses must die, but only as Aaron died before him, v. 13. And Moses had seen how easily and cheerfully Aaron had put off the priesthood first and then the body; let not Moses therefore be afraid of dying; it was but to be *gathered to his people*, as Aaron was gathered. Thus the death of our near and dear relations should be improved by us, [1.] As an engagement to us to think often of dying. We are not better than our fathers or brethren; if they are gone, we are going; if they are gathered already, we must be gathered very shortly. [2.] As an encouragement to us to think of death without terror, and even to please ourselves with the thoughts of it. It is but to die as such and such died, if we live as they lived; and their *end was peace, they finished their course with joy*; why then should we fear any evil in that melancholy valley?

### **Verses 15-23**

Here, I. Moses prays for a successor. When God had told him that he must die, though it appears elsewhere that he solicited for a reprieve for himself (Deu. 3:24, 25), yet, when this could not be obtained, he begged earnestly that the work of God might be carried on, though he might not have the honour of finishing it. 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 endeavours, for the rising generation, that religion may flourish, and the interests of God's kingdom among men may be maintained and advanced, when we are in our graves. In this prayer Moses expresses, 1. A tender concern for the people of Israel: *That the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd*. Our Saviour uses this comparison in his compassions for the people when they wanted good ministers, Mt. 9:36. Magistrates and ministers are the shepherds of a people; if these be wanting, or be not as they should be, people are apt to wander and be scattered abroad, are exposed to enemies, and in danger of wanting food and of hurting one another, *as sheep having no shepherd*. 2. A believing dependence upon God, as the *God of the spirits of all flesh*. He is both the former and the searcher of spirits, and therefore can either find men fit or make them fit to serve his purposes, for the good of his church. Moses prays to God, not to send an angel, but to *set a man over the congregation*, that is, to nominate and appoint one whom he would qualify and own as ruler of his people Israel. Before God gave this blessing to Israel, he stirred up Moses to pray for it: thus Christ, before he sent forth his apostles, called to those about him *to pray the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest*, Mt. 9:38.

II. God, in answer to his prayer, appoints him a successor, even Joshua, who had long since 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 is the man whom God pitches upon 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), the *spirit of government* (he is fit to do the work and discharge the trusts of his place), a spirit of conduct and courage; and he had also the *spirit of prophecy*, for the Lord often *spoke unto him*, Jos. 4:1; 6:2; 7:10. Now here,

1. God directs Moses how to secure the succession to Joshua. (1.) He must ordain him: *Lay thy hand upon him*, v. 18. This was done in token of Moses' transferring the government to him, as the laying of hands on the sacrifice put the offering in the place and stead of the offerer; also in token of God's conferring the blessing of the Spirit upon him, which Moses obtained by prayer. It is said (Deu. 34:9), *Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him*. This rite of imposing hands we find used in the New Testament in the setting apart of gospel ministers, denoting a solemn designation of them to the office and an earnest desire that God would qualify them for it and own them in it. It is the offering of them to Christ and his church for living sacrifices. (2.) He must present him to Eleazar and the people, set him before them, that they might know him to be designed of God for this great trust and consent to that designation. (3.) He must *give him a charge*, v. 19. He must be charged with the people of Israel, who were delivered into his hand as sheep into the hand of a shepherd, and for whom he must be accountable. He must be strictly charged to do his duty to them; though they were under his command, he was under God's command, and from him must receive charge. The highest must know that there is a higher than they. This charge must be given him *in their sight*, that it might be the more affecting to Joshua, and that the people, seeing the work and care of their prince, might be the more engaged to assist and encourage him. (4.) He must *put some of his honour upon him*, v. 20. Joshua at the most had but some of the honour of Moses, and in many instances came short of him; but this seems to be meant of his taking him now, while he lived, into partnership with him in the government and admitting him to act with authority as his assistant. It is an honour to be employed for God and his church; some of this honour must be put upon Joshua, that the people, being used to obey him while Moses lived, might the more cheerfully do it afterwards. (5.) He must appoint Eleazar the high priest, with this breast-plate of judgment, to be his privy-council (v. 21): *He shall stand before Eleazar*, by him to consult the oracle, ready to receive and observe all the instructions that should be given him by it. This was a direction to Joshua. Though he was full of the Spirit, and had all this honour put upon him, yet he must do nothing without asking counsel of God, not leaning to his own understanding. It was also a great encouragement to him. To govern Israel, and to conquer Canaan, were two hard tasks, but God assures him that in both he should be under a divine conduct; and in every difficult case God would advise him to that which should be for the best. Moses had recourse to the oracle of God himself, but Joshua and the succeeding judges must use the ministry of the high priest, and consult the judgment of urim, which, the Jews say, might not be enquired of but by the king or the head of the sanhedrim, or by the agent or representative of the people, for them, and in their name. Thus the government of Israel was now purely divine, for both the designation and direction of their princes were entirely so. *At the word of the priest*, according to the *judgment of urim*, Joshua and all Israel must go out and come in; and no doubt God, who thus guided, would preserve both their going out and their coming in. Those are safe, and may be easy, that

follow God, and in all their ways acknowledge him.

2. Moses does according to these directions, v. 22, 23. He cheerfully ordained Joshua, (1.) Though it was a present lessening to himself, and amounted almost to a resignation of the government. He was very willing that the people should look off from him, and gaze on the rising sun. (2.) Though it might appear a perpetual slur upon his family. It would not have been so much his praise if he had thus resigned his honour to a son of his own; but with his own hands first to ordain Eleazar high priest, and then Joshua, one of another tribe, chief ruler, while his own children had no preferment at all, but were left in the rank of common Levites, this was such an instance of self-denial and submission to the will of God as was more his glory than the highest advancement of his family could have been; for it confirms his character as the meekest man upon earth, and faithful to him that appointed him in all his house. This (says the excellent bishop Patrick) shows him to have had a principle which raised him above all other lawgivers, who always took care to establish their families in some share of that greatness which they themselves possessed; but hereby it appeared that Moses acted not from himself, because he acted not for himself.

## Chapter 28

Now that the people were numbered, orders given for the dividing of the land, and a general of the forces nominated and commissioned, one would have expected that the next chapter should begin the history of the campaign, or at least should give us an account of the ordinances of war; no, it contains the ordinances of worship, and provides that now, as they were on the point of entering Canaan, they should be sure to take their religion along with them, and not forget this, in the prosecution of their wars (v. 1, 2). The laws are here repeated and summed up concerning the sacrifices that were to be offered, I. Daily (v. 3-8). II. Weekly (v. 9, 10). III. Monthly (v. 11-15). IV. Yearly. 1. At the passover (v. 16-25). 2. At pentecost (v. 26-31). And the next chapter is concerning the annual solemnities of the seventh month.

### Verses 1-8

Here is, I. A general order given concerning the offerings of the Lord, which were to be brought in their season, v. 2. These laws are here given afresh, not because the observance of them was wholly disused during their thirty-eight years' wandering in the wilderness (we cannot think that they were so long without any public worship, but that at least the daily lamb was offered morning and evening, and doubled on the sabbath day; so bishop Patrick conjectures); but that many of the sacrifices were then omitted is plainly intimated, Amos v. 25, quoted by Stephen, Acts 7:42. *Did you offer unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?* It is implied, "No, you did not." But, whether the course of sacrifices had been interrupted or no, God saw fit now to repeat the law of sacrifices, 1. Because this was a new generation of men, that were most of them unborn when the former laws were given; therefore, that they might be left without excuse, they have not only these laws written, to be read to them, but again repeated from God himself, and put into a less compass and a plainer method. 2. Because they were now entering upon war, and might be tempted to think that while they were engaged in that they should be excused from offering sacrifices. *Inter arma silent leges—law is little regarded amidst the clash of arms.* No, says God, *my bread for my sacrifices even now shall you observe to offer, and that in the due season.* They were peculiarly concerned to keep their peace with God when they were at war with their enemies. In the wilderness they were solitary, and quite separate from all other people, and therefore there they needed not so much their distinguishing badges, nor would their omission of sacrifices be so scandalous as when they came into Canaan, when they mingled with other people. 3. Because possession was now to be given them of the land of promise, that land flowing with milk and honey, where they would have plenty of all good things. "Now" (says God), "When you are feasting yourselves, forget not to offer the bread of your God." Canaan was given to them upon this condition, that they should *observe God's statutes*, Ps. 105:44, 45.

II. The particular law of the daily sacrifice, a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening, which, for the constancy of it as duly as the day came, is called a *continual burnt-offering* (v. 3), which intimates that when we are bidden to *pray always, and to pray without ceasing*, it is intended that at least every morning and every evening we offer up our solemn prayers and praises to God. This is said to be *ordained in Mount Sinai* (v. 6), when the other laws were given. The institution of it we have, Ex. 29:38. Nothing is here added in the repetition of the law, but that the wine to be poured out in the drink-offering is ordered

to be *strong wine* (v. 7), the riches and most generous and best-bodied wine they could get. Though it was to be poured out upon the altar, and not drunk (they therefore might be ready to think the worst would serve to be so thrown away), yet God requires the strongest, to teach us to serve God with the best we have. The wine must be strong (says Ainsworth) because 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 upon the *sacrifice and service of our faith*, Phil. 2:17.

### **Verses 9-15**

The new moons and the sabbaths are often spoken of together, as great solemnities in the Jewish church, very comfortable to the saints then, and typical of gospel grace. Now we have here the sacrifices appointed, 1. For the sabbaths. Every sabbath day the offering must be doubled; besides the two lambs offered for the daily burnt-offering, there must be two more offered, one (it is probable) added to the morning sacrifice, and the other to the evening, v. 9, 10. 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 to a more close application to the sabbath work, which ought to fill up sabbath time. In Ezekiel's temple-service, which points at gospel times, the sabbath offerings were to be six lambs and a ram, with their meat-offerings, and drink-offerings (Eze. 46:4, 5), to intimate not only the continuance, but the advancement, of sabbath sanctification in the days of the Messiah. This is *the burnt-offering of the sabbath in his sabbath*, so it is in the original, v. 10. We must do every sabbath day's work in its day, studying to redeem every minute of sabbath time as those that believe it precious; and not thinking to put off one sabbath's work to another, for sufficient to every sabbath is the service thereof. 2. For the new moons. Some suggest that, as the sabbath was kept with an eye to the creation of the world, so the new moons were sanctified with an eye to the divine providence, which *appoints the moon for seasons*, guiding the revolutions of time by its changes, and governing sublunary bodies (as many think) by its influences. Though we observe not any feast of new moons, yet we must not forget to give God the glory of all the precious things put forth by the moon which he has *established for ever, a faithful witness in heaven*, Ps. 89:37. The offerings in the new moons were very considerable, two bullocks, a ram, and seven lambs, with the meat-offerings and drink-offerings that were to attend them (v. 11, etc.), besides a sin-offering, v. 15. For, when we give glory to God by confessing his mercies, we must give glory to him likewise by confessing our own sins; and, when we rejoice in the gifts of common providence, we must make the sacrifice of Christ, that great gift of special grace, the fountain and spring-head of our joy. Some have questioned whether the new moons were to be reckoned among their feasts; but why should they not, when, besides the special sacrifices which were then to be offered, they rested from servile works (Amos 8:5), *blew the trumpets* (ch. 10:10), and went to the prophets *to hear the word*? 2 Ki. 4:23. And the worship performed in the new moons is made typical of gospel solemnities, Isa. 66:23.

### **Verses 16-31**

Here is, I. The appointment of the pass-over sacrifices; not that which was the chief, the paschal lamb (sufficient instructions had formerly been given concerning that), but those which were to be offered upon the seven days of unleavened bread, which followed it, v. 17–25. The first and last of those seven days were to be sanctified as sabbaths, by a holy rest and a holy convocation, and on each of the seven days they were to be liberal in their sacrifices, in token of their great and constant

thankfulness for their deliverance out of Egypt: *Two bullocks, a ram, and seven lambs*. A gospel conversation, in gratitude for *Christ our passover* who was sacrificed, is called the *keeping of this feast* (1 Co. 5:8); for it is not enough that we purge out the *leavened bread* of malice and wickedness, but we must *offer the bread of our God, even the sacrifice of praise, continually*, and continue herein unto the end. 2. The sacrifices are likewise appointed which were to be offered at the feast of pentecost, here called the *day of the first-fruits*, v. 26. In the feast of unleavened bread they offered a *sheaf of their first-fruits* of barley (which with them was first ripe) to the priest (Lev. 23:10), as an introduction to the harvest; but now, about seven weeks after, they were to bring a *new meat-offering to the Lord*, at the end of harvest, in thankfulness to God, who had not only given, *but preserved to their use, the kindly fruits of the earth, so as that in due time they did enjoy them*. It was at this feast that *the Spirit was poured out* (Acts 2:1, etc.), and thousands were converted by the preaching of the apostles, and were presented to Christ, to be *a kind of first-fruits of his creatures*. The sacrifice that was to be offered with the loaves of the first-fruits was appointed, Lev. 23:18. But over and above, besides that and besides the daily offerings, they were to offer *two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs, with a kid for a sin-offering*, v. 27–30. When God sows plentifully upon us he expects to reap accordingly from us. Bishop Patrick observes that no *peace-offerings* are appointed in this chapter, which were chiefly for the benefit of the offerers, and therefore in them they were left more to themselves; but *burnt-offerings* were purely for the honour of God, were confessions of his dominion, and typified evangelical piety and devotion, by which the soul is wholly offered up to God in the flames of holy love; and *sin-offerings* were typical of Christ's sacrifice of himself, *by which we and our services are perfected and sanctified*.

## Chapter 29

This chapter appoints the offerings that were to be made by fire unto the Lord in the three great solemnities of the seventh month. I. In the feast of trumpets on the first day of that month (v. 1-6). II. In the day of atonement on the tenth day (v. 7-11). III. In the feast of tabernacles on the fifteenth day and the seven days following (v. 12-38). And then the conclusion of these ordinances (v. 39, 40).

### Verses 1-11

There were more sacred solemnities in the seventh month than in any other month of the year, not only because it had been the first month till the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (which, falling in the month Abib, occasioned that to be thenceforth made the *beginning of the months* in all ecclesiastical computations), but because still it continued the first month in the civil reckonings of the jubilees and years of release, and also because it was the time of vacation between harvest and seedtime, when they had most leisure to attend the sanctuary, which intimates that, though God will dispense with sacrifices in consideration of works of necessity and mercy, yet the more leisure we have from the pressing occasions of this life the more time we should spend in the immediate service of God. 1. We have here the appointment of the sacrifices that were to be offered on the first day of the month, the day of *blowing the trumpets*, which was a preparative for the two great solemnities of holy mourning on the day of atonement and of holy joy in the feast of tabernacles. The intention of divine institutions is well answered when one religious service helps to fit us for another and all for heaven. The *blowing of the trumpets* was appointed, Lev. 23:24. Here the people are directed what sacrifices to offer on that day, of which there was not then any mention made. Note, Those who would know the mind of God in the scripture must compare one part of the scripture with another, and put those parts together that have reference to the same thing, for the latter discoveries of divine light explain what was dark and supply what was defective in the former, *that the man of God may be perfect*. The sacrifices then to be offered are particularly ordered here (v. 2-6), and care taken that these should not supersede the daily oblation and that of the new moon. It is hereby intimated that we must not seek occasions to abate our zeal in God's service, nor be glad of an excuse to omit a good duty, but rather rejoice in an opportunity of accumulating and doing more than ordinary in religion. If we perform family-worship, we must not think that this will excuse us from our secret devotions; nor that on the days we go to church we need not worship God alone and with our families; but we should *always abound in the work of the Lord*. 2. On the *day of atonement*. Besides all the services of that day, which we had the institution of, Lev. 16, and which, one would think, required trouble and charge enough, here are burnt-offerings ordered to be offered, v. 8-10. For in our faith and repentance, those two great gospel graces which were signified by that day's performances, we must have an eye to the glory and honour of God, which was purely intended in the burnt-offerings; there was likewise to be a *kid of the goats for a sin-offering, besides the great sin-offering of atonement* (v. 11), which intimates that there are so many defects and faults, even in the exercises and expressions of our repentance, that we have need of an interest in a sacrifice to expiate the guilt even of that part of our holy things. Though we must not repent that we have repented, yet we must repent that we have not repented better. It likewise intimated the

imperfection of the legal sacrifices, and their insufficiency to take away sin, that on the very day the *sin-offering of atonement* was offered, yet there must be another sin-offering. But *what the law could not do, in that it was weak*, that Christ has done.

### **Verses 12-40**

Soon after the day of atonement, that day in which men were to afflict their souls, followed the feast of tabernacles, in which they were to rejoice before the Lord; for those that *sow in tears* shall soon *reap in joy*. To the former laws about this feast, which we had, Lev. 23:34, etc., here are added directions about the *offerings by fire*, which they were to offer unto the Lord during the *seven days of that feast*, Lev. 23:36. Observe here, 1. Their days of rejoicing were to be days of sacrifices. A disposition to be cheerful does us no harm, nor is any bad symptom, when it is so far from unfitting us for the duties of God's immediate service that it encourages and enlarges our hearts in them. 2. All the days of their dwelling in booths they must offer sacrifices. While we are here in a tabernacle-state, it is our interest as well as duty constantly to keep up communion with God; nor will the unsettledness of our outward condition excuse us in our neglect of the duties of God's worship. 3. The sacrifices for each of the seven days, though differing in nothing but the number of the bullocks, are severally and particularly appointed, which yet is no vain repetition; for God would thus teach them to be very exact in those observances, and to keep an eye of faith fixed upon the institution in every day's work. It likewise intimates that the repetition of the same services, if performed with an upright heart, and with a continued fire of pious and devout affection, is no weariness to God, and therefore we ought not to snuff at it, or to say, *Behold, what a weariness it is to us!* 4. The number of bullocks (which were the most costly part of the sacrifice) decreased every day. On the first day of the feast they were to offer thirteen, on the second day but twelve, on the third day eleven, etc. So that on the seventh they offered seven; and the last day, though it was the great day of the feast, and celebrated with a holy convocation, yet they were to offer but one bullock; and, whereas on all the other days they offered two rams and fourteen lambs, on this they offered but one ram and seven lambs. Such was the will of the Law-maker, and that is reason enough for the law. Some suggest that God herein considered the infirmity of the flesh, which is apt to grudge the charge and expense of religion; it is therefore ordered to grow less and less, that they might not complain as if God had *made them to serve with an offering*, Isa. 43:23. Or it is hereby intimated to them that the legal dispensation should wax old, and vanish away at last; and the multitude of their sacrifices should end in one great sacrifice, infinitely more worthy than all of them. It was on the last day of the feast, after all these sacrifices had been ordered, that our Lord Jesus stood and cried to those who still thirsted after righteousness (being sensible of the insufficiency of these sacrifices to justify them) *to come unto him and drink*, Jn. 7:37. 5. The meat-offerings and drink-offerings attended all the sacrifices, *according to their number, after the manner*. Be there ever so much flesh, it is no feast without bread and drink, therefore these must never be omitted at God's altar, which was his table. We must not think that doing much in religion will be accepted if we do not do it well, and after the manner that God has appointed. 6. Every day there must be a sin-offering presented, as we observed in the other feasts. Our burnt-offerings of praise cannot be accepted of God unless we have an interest in the great sacrifice of propitiation which Christ offered when for us he made himself a sin-offering. 7. Even when all these sacrifices were offered, yet the continual burnt-offering must not be omitted either morning or evening, but each day this must be offered first in the morning and last in

the evening. No extraordinary services should jostle out our stated devotions. 8. Though all these sacrifices were required to be presented by the body of the congregation, at the common charge, yet, besides these, particular persons were to glorify God with their vows and their free-will offerings, v. 39. When God commanded that this *they must do*, he left room for the generosity of their devotion, a great deal more they *might do*, not inventing other worships, but abounding in these, as 2 Chr. 30:23, 24. Large directions had been given in Leviticus concerning the offerings of all sorts that should be brought by particular persons according to the providences of God concerning them and the graces of God in them. Though every Israelite had an interest in these common sacrifices, yet he must not think that these will serve instead of his vows and his free-will offerings. Thus our ministers' praying with us and for us will not excuse us from praying for ourselves.

## Chapter 30

In this chapter we have a law concerning vows, which had been mentioned in the close of the foregoing chapter. I. Here is a general rule laid down that all vows must be carefully performed (v. 1, 2). II. Some particular exceptions to this rule. 1. That the vows of daughters should not be binding unless allowed by the father (v. 3-5). Nor, 2. The vows of wives unless allowed by the husband (v. 6, etc.).

### Verses 1-2

This law was delivered to the heads of the tribes that they might instruct those who were under their charge, explain the law to them, give then necessary cautions, and call them to account, if there were occasion, for the breach of their vows. Perhaps the heads of the tribes had, upon some emergency of this kind, consulted Moses, and desired by him to know the mind of God, and here they are told it: *This is the thing which the Lord has commanded* concerning vows, and it is a command still in force.

1. The case supposed is that a person vows a vow unto the Lord, making God a party to the promise, and designing his honour and glory in it. The matter of the vow is supposed to be something lawful: no man can be by his own promise bound to do that which he is already by the divine precept prohibited from doing. Yet it is supposed to be something which, in such and such measures and degrees, was not a necessary duty antecedent to the vow. A person might vow to bring such and such sacrifices at certain times, to give such and such a sum or such a proportion in alms, to forbear such meats and drinks which the law allowed, to fast and afflict the soul (which is specified v. 13) at other times besides the day of atonement. And many similar vows might be made in an extraordinary heat of holy zeal, in humiliation for some sin committed or for the prevention of sin, in the pursuit of some mercy desired or in gratitude for some mercy received. It is of great use to make such vows as these, provided they be made in sincerity with due caution. Vows (say the Jewish doctors) are *the hedge of separation*, that is, a fence to religion. He that vows is here said to *bind his soul with a bond*. It is a vow to God, who is a spirit, and to him the soul, with all its powers, must be bound. A promise to man is a bond upon the estate, but a promise to God is a bond upon the soul. Our sacramental vows, by which we are bound to no more than what was before our duty, and which neither father nor husband can disannul, are bonds upon the soul, and by them we must feel ourselves bound out from all sin and bound up to the whole will of God. Our occasional vows concerning that which before was *in our own power* (Acts 5:4), when they are made, are bonds upon the soul likewise. 2. The command given is that these vows be conscientiously performed: *He shall not break his word*, though afterwards he may change his mind, but he shall do according to what he has said. *Margin, He shall not profane his word*. Vowing is an ordinance of God; if we vow in hypocrisy we profane that ordinance: it is plainly determined, *Better not vow than vow and not pay*, Eccl. 5:5. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*. His promises to us are *yea and amen*, let not ours to him be *yea and nay*.

### Verses 3-16

It is here taken for granted that all such persons as are *sui juris*—*at their own disposal*, and are likewise of sound understanding and memory, are bound to perform whatever they vow that is lawful and possible; but, if the person vowing be under the

dominion and at the disposal of another, the case is different. Two cases much alike are here put and determined:—

I. The case of a daughter in her father's house: and some think, probably enough, that it extends to a son likewise, while he is at home with his father, and under tutors and governors. Whether the exception may thus be stretched I cannot say. *Non est distinguendum, ubi lex non distinguit—We are not allowed to make distinctions which the law does not.* The rule is general, If a man vow, he must pay. But for a daughter it is express: her vow is nugatory or in suspense till her father knows it, and (it is supposed) knows it from her; for, when it comes to his knowledge, it is in his power either to ratify or nullify it. But in favour of the vow, 1. Even his silence shall suffice to ratify it: If he *hold his peace, her vows shall stand*, v. 4. *Qui tacet, consentire videtur—Silence gives consent.* Hereby he allows his daughter the liberty she has assumed, and, as long as he says nothing against her vow, she shall be bound by it. But, 2. His protestation against it shall perfectly disannul it, because it is possible that such vow may be prejudicial to the affairs of the family, break the father's measures, perplex the provision made for his table if the vow related to meats, or lessen the provision made for his children if the vow would be more expensive than his estate would bear; however, it was certain that it was an infringement of his authority over his child, and therefore, if he disallow it, she is discharged, and *the Lord shall forgive her*, that is, she shall not be charged with the guilt of violating her vow; she showed her good-will in making the vow, and, if her intentions therein were sincere, she shall be accounted better than sacrifice. This shows how great a deference children owe to their parents, and how much they ought to honour them and be obedient to them. It is for the interest of the public that the paternal authority be supported; for, when children are countenanced in their disobedience to their parents (as they were by the tradition of the elders, Mt. 15:5, 6), they soon become in other things *children of Belial*. If this law be not to be extended to children's marrying without their parents' consent so far as to put it in parents' power to annul the marriage and dissolve the obligation (as some have thought it does), yet certainly it proves the sinfulness of it, and obliges the children that have thus done foolishly to repent and humble themselves before God and their parents.

II. The case of a wife is much the same. As for a woman that is a widow or divorced, she has neither father nor husband to control her, so that, whatever vows she binds her soul with, they shall *stand against her* (v. 9), it is at her peril if she run back; but a wife, who has nothing that she can strictly call her own, but with her husband's allowance, cannot, without that, make any such vow. 1. The law is plain in case of a wife that continues so long after the vow. If her husband allow her vow, though only by silence, it must stand, v. 6, 7. If he disallow it, since her obligation to that which she had vowed arose purely from her own act, and not from any prior command of God, her obligation to her husband shall take place of it, for to him she ought to be in subjection *as unto the Lord*; and now it is so far from being her duty to fulfil her vow that it would be her sin to disobey her husband, whose consent perhaps she ought to have asked before she made the vow; therefore she needs *forgiveness*, v. 8. 2. The law is the same in case of a wife that soon after becomes a widow, or is put away. Though, if she return to her father's house, she does not therefore so come again under his authority as that he has power to disannul her vows (v. 9), yet if the vow was made while she was in the house of her husband, and her husband disallowed it, it was made void and of no effect for ever, and she does not return under the law of her vow when she is loosed from the law of her husband. This seems to be the

distinct meaning of v. 10–14, which otherwise would be but a repetition of v. 6-8. But it is added (v. 15) that, if the husband make void the vows of his wife, he shall *bear her iniquity*; that is, if the thing she had vowed was really good, for the honour of God and the prosperity of her own soul, and the husband disallowed it out of covetousness, or humour, or to show his authority, though she be discharged from the obligation of her vow, yet he will have a great deal to answer for. Now here it is very observable how carefully the divine law consults the good order of families, and preserves the power of superior relations, and the duty and reverence of inferiors. It is fit that every man should *bear rule in his own house*, and have his wife and children in subjection with all gravity; and rather than this great rule should be broken, or any encouragement given to inferior relations to break those bonds asunder, God himself would quit his right, and release the obligations even of a solemn vow; so much does religion strengthen the ties of all relations, and secure the welfare of all societies, that in it the *families of the earth are blessed*.

## Chapter 31

This chapter belongs to "the book of the wars of the Lord," in which it is probable it was inserted. It is the history of a holy war, a war with Midian. Here is, I. A divine command for the war (v. 1, 2). II. The undertaking of the war (v. 3-6). III. The glorious success of it (v. 7-12). IV. Their triumphant return from the war. 1. The respect Moses paid to the soldiers (v. 13). 2. The rebuke he gave them for sparing the women (v. 14-18). 3. The directions he gave them for the purifying of themselves and their effects (v. 19-24). 4. The distribution of the spoil they had taken, one half to the soldiers, the other to the congregation, and a tribute to the Lord out of each (v. 25-47). 5. The free-will offering of the officers (v. 48, etc.).

### Verses 1-6

Here, I. The Lord of hosts gives orders to Moses to make war upon the Midianites, and his commission no doubt justified this war, though it will not serve to justify the like without such commission. The Midianites were the posterity of Abraham by Ketuarah, Gen. 25:2. Some of them settled south of Canaan, among whom Jethro lived, and they retained the worship of the true God; but these were settled east of Canaan, and had fallen into idolatry, neighbours to, and in confederacy with, the Moabites. Their land was not designed to be given to Israel, nor would Israel have meddled with them if they had not made themselves obnoxious to their resentment by sending their bad women among them to draw them to whoredom and idolatry. This was the provocation, this was the quarrel. For this (says God) *avenge Israel of the Midianites*, v. 2. 1. God would have the Midianites chastised, an inroad made upon that part of their country which lay next to the camp of Israel, and which was probably more concerned in that mischief than the Moabites, who therefore were let alone. God will have us to reckon those our worst enemies that draw us to sin, and to avoid them; and since *every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lusts*, and these are the Midianites which ensnare us with their wiles, on them we should avenge ourselves, not only make no league with them, but make war upon them by living a life of mortification. God had taken vengeance on his own people for yielding to the Midianites' temptations; now the Midianites, that gave the temptation, must be reckoned with, for *the deceived and the deceiver are his* (Job 12:16), both accountable to his tribunal; and, though *judgment begin at the house of God*, it shall not end there, 1 Pt. 4:17. There is a day coming when vengeance will be taken on those that have introduced errors and corruptions into the church, and the devil that deceived men will be *cast into the lake of fire*. Israel's quarrel with Amalek, that fought against them, was not avenged till long after: but their quarrel with Midian, that debauched them, was speedily avenged, for they were looked upon as much more the dangerous and malicious enemies. 2. God would have it done by Moses, in his life-time, that he who had so deeply resented that injury might have the satisfaction of seeing it avenged. "See this execution done upon the enemies of God and Israel, and *afterwards thou shalt be gathered to thy people*." This was the only piece of service of this kind that Moses must further do, and then he has accomplished, as a hireling, his day, and shall have his *quietus—enter into rest*: hitherto his usefulness must come, and no further; the wars of Canaan must be carried on by another hand. Note, God sometimes removes useful men when we think they can be ill spared; but this ought to satisfy us, that they are never removed till they have done the work which was appointed them.

II. Moses gives orders to the people to prepare for this expedition, v. 3. He would not have the whole body of the camp to stir, but they must *arm some of themselves to the war*, such as were either most fit or most forward, and *avenge the Lord of Midian*. God said, *Avenge Israel*; Moses says, *Avenge the Lord*; for the interests of God and Israel are united, and the cause of both is one and the same. And if God, in what he does, shows himself jealous for the honour of Israel, surely Israel, in what they do, ought to show themselves jealous for the glory of God. Then only we can justify the avenging of ourselves when it is the vengeance of the Lord that we engage in. Nay, for this reason we are forbidden to avenge ourselves, because God has said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*.

III. A detachment is drawn out accordingly for this service, 1000 *out of every tribe*, 12,000 in all, a small number in comparison with what they could have sent, and it is probable small in comparison with the number of the enemies they were sent against. But God would teach them that it is all one to him *to save by many or by few*, 1 Sa. 14:6.

IV. Phinehas the son of Eleazar is sent along with them. It is strange that no mention is made of Joshua in this great action. If he was general of these forces, who do we not find him leading them out? If he tarried at home, why do we not find him meeting them with Moses at their return? It is probable, each tribe having a captain of its own thousand, there was no general, but they proceeded in the order of their march through the wilderness, Judah first, and the rest in their posts, under the command of their respective captains, spoken of v. 48. But, the war being a holy war, Phinehas was their common head, not to supply the place of a general, but, by the oracle of God, to determine the resolves of their counsels of war, in which the captains of thousands would all acquiesce, and according to which they would act in conjunction. He therefore took with him the holy instruments or vessels, probably the breast-plate of judgment, by which God might be consulted in any emergency. Though he was not yet the high priest, yet he might be delegated *pro hac vice—for this particular occasion*, to bear the urim and thummim, as 1 Sa. 23:6. And there was a particular reason for sending Phinehas to preside in this expedition; he has already signalized himself for his zeal against the Midianites and their cursed arts to ensnare Israel when he slew Cozbi, a daughter of a chief house in Midian, for her impudence in the matter of Peor, ch. 25:15. He that had so well used the sword of justice against a particular criminal was best qualified to guide the sword of war against the whole nation. *Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things*.

### **Verses 7-12**

Here is, 1. The descent which this little army of Israelites made, under the divine commission, conduct, and command, upon the country of Midian. They *warred against the Midianites*. It is very probable that they first published their manifesto, showing the reasons of the war, and requiring them to give up the ringleaders of the mischief to justice; for such afterwards was the *law* (Deu. 20:10), and such the *practice*, Jdg. 20:12, 13. But the Midianites justifying what they had done, and standing by those that had done it, the Israelites attacked them with fire and sword, and all the pious fury with which their zeal for God and their people inspired them. 2. The execution (the military execution) they did in this descent. (1.) *They slew all the males* (v. 7), that is, all they met with as far as they went; they put them all to the sword, and gave no quarter. But that they did not slay all the males of the nation is certain, for we find the Midianites a powerful and formidable enemy to Israel in the days of

Gideon; and they were the Midianites of this country, for they are reckoned with the *children of the east*, Jdg. 6:3. (2.) They *slew the kings of Midian* the same that are called *elders of Midian* (ch. 22:4), and the *dukes of Sihon*, Jos. 13:21. Five of these princes are here named, one of whom is *Zur*, probably the same *Zur* whose daughter *Cosbi* was, ch. 25:15. (3.) They slew *Balaam*. Many conjectures there are as to what brought *Balaam* among the Midianites at this time; it is probable that the Midianites, having intelligence of the march of this army of Israelites against them, hired *Balaam* to come and assist them with his enchantments, that if he could not prevail to act offensively in their favour, by cursing the armies of Israel, yet he might act defensively, by blessing the country of Midian. Whatever was the occasion of his being there, God's overruling providence brought him thither, and there his just vengeance found him. Had he himself believed what he said of the happy state of Israel, he would not have herded thus with the enemies of Israel; but justly does he die the death of the wicked (though he pretended to desire that of the righteous), and go *down slain to the pit with the uncircumcised*, who rebelled thus against the convictions of his own conscience. The Midianites' wives were *Balaam's* projects, it was therefore just that he should perish with them, Hos. 4:5. Now was *his* folly made manifest to all men, who foretold the fate of others, but foresaw not his own. (4.) They took all the *women and children captives*, v. 9. (5.) They *burnt their cities and goodly castles* (v. 10), not designing to inhabit them themselves (that country was out of their line), but they thus prevented those who had made their escape from sheltering themselves in their own country and settling there again. Some understand it of their idol-temples; it was fit that they should share in this vengeance. (6.) They plundered the country, and carried off all the cattle and valuable goods, and so returned to the camp of Israel laden with a very rich booty, v. 9, 11, 12. Thus (as when they came out of Egypt) they were enriched with the spoils of their enemies, and furnished with stock for the good land into which God was bringing them.

### **Verses 13-24**

We have here the triumphant return of the army of Israel from the war with Midian, and here,

I. They were met with great respect, v. 13. Moses himself, notwithstanding his age and gravity, walked out of the camp to congratulate them on their victory, and to grace the solemnity of their triumphs. Public successes should be publicly acknowledged, to the glory of God, and the encouragement of those that have jeopardized their lives in their country's cause.

II. They were severely reprov'd for saving the women alive. It is very probable that Moses had commanded them to kill the women, at least this was implied in the general order to avenge Israel of the Midianites; the execution having reference to that crime, their drawing them in to the worship of Peor, it was easy to conclude that the women, who were the principal criminals, must not be spared. What! says Moses, *have you saved the women alive?* v. 15. He was moved with a holy indignation at the sight of them. *These were those that caused the children of Israel to commit this trespass;* and therefore, 1. It is just that they should die. The law in case of whoredom was, *The adulterer and adulteress should surely be put to death*. God had put to death the adulterers of Israel by the plague, and now it was fit that the adulteresses of Midian, especially since they had been the tempters, should be put to death by the sword. 2. "It is dangerous to let them live; they will be still tempting the Israelites to uncleanness, and so your captives will be your conquerors and a second time your destroyers." Severe orders are therefore given that all the grown women should be slain in cold blood, and only the female children spared.

III. They were obliged to purify themselves, according to the ceremony of the law, and to abide without the camp seven days, till their purification was accomplished. For, 1. They had imbrued their hands in blood, by which though they had not contracted any moral guilt, the war being just and lawful, yet they were brought under a ceremonial uncleanness, which rendered them unfit to come near the tabernacle till they were purified. Thus God would preserve in their minds a dread and detestation of murder. David must not build the temple because he had been a *man of war, and had shed blood*, 1 Chr. 28:3. 2. They could not but have touched dead bodies, by which they were polluted, and that required they should be purified with the water of separation, v. 19, 20, 24.

IV. They must likewise purify the spoil they had taken, the captives (v. 19) and all the goods, v. 21–23. What would bear the fire must pass through the fire, and what would not must be washed with water. These things had been use by Midianites, and, having now come into the possession of Israelites, it was fit that they should be sanctified to the service of that holy nation and the honour of their holy God. To us now every thing is sanctified by the word and prayer, if we are sanctified by the Spirit, who is compared both to fire and water. *To the pure all things are pure.*

#### **Verses 25–47**

We have here the distribution of the spoil which was taken in this expedition against Midian. God himself directed how it should be distributed, and Moses and Eleazar did according to the directions, and thus unhappy contests among themselves were prevented and the victory was made to turn to the common benefit. It was fit that he who gave them the prey should order the disposal of it. All we have is from God, and therefore must be subject to his will.

I. The prey is ordered to be divided into two parts, one for the 12,000 men that undertook the war, and the other for the congregation. The prey that was divided seems to have been only the captives and the cattle; as for the plate, and jewels, and other goods, every man kept what he took, as is intimated, v. 50–53. That only was distributed which would be of use for the stocking of that good land into which they were going. Now observe, 1. That the one half of the prey was given to the whole congregation, Moses allotting to each tribe its share, and then leaving it to the heads of the tribes to divide their respective shares among themselves, according to their families. The war was undertaken on the behalf of the whole congregation; they would all have been ready to *go to the help of the Lord against the mighty*, if they had been so ordered, and they did help, it is likely, by their prayers; and therefore God appoints that those that *tarried at home should divide the spoil*, Ps. 68:12. David, in his time, made it a *statute and an ordinance for Israel*, that, as his part is that *goes down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff*, 1 Sa. 30:24, 25. Those that are employed in public trusts must not think to benefit themselves only by their toils and hazards, but must aim at the advantage of the community. 2. That yet the 12,000 that went to the battle had as much for their share as the whole congregation (which were fifty times as many) had for theirs; so that the particular persons of the soldiery had a much better share than any of their brethren that tarried at home: and good reason they should. The greater pains we take, and the greater hazards we run, in the service of God and our generation, the greater will our recompence be at last; *for God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love.*

II. God was to have a tribute out of it, as an acknowledgment of his sovereignty over them in general, and that he was their

king to whom *tribute was due*, and particularly of his interest in this war and the gains of it, he having given them their success; and that the priests, the Lord's receivers, might have something added to the provision made for their maintenance. Note, Whatever we have, God must have his dues out of it. And here (as before) the soldiers are favoured above the rest of the congregation, for out of the people's share God required one in fifty, but out of the soldier's share only one in 500, because the people got theirs easily, without any peril or fatigue. The less opportunity we have of honouring God with our personal services the more it is expected we should honour him with our substance. The tribute out of the soldiers' half was given to the priests (v. 29), that out of the people's half was given to the Levites, v. 30. For the priests were taken from among the Levites, as these soldiers from among the people, for special and hazardous service, and their pay was proportioned accordingly.

#### **Verses 48-54**

Here is a great example of piety and devotion in the officers of the army, the colonels, that are called *captains of thousands*, and the inferior officers that were *captains of hundreds*; they came to Moses as their general and commander-in-chief, and, though he was now going off the stage they very humbly and respectfully addressed themselves to him, calling themselves his *servants*; the honours they had won did not puff them up, so as to make them forget their duty to him. Observe in their address to them, 1. The pious notice they take of God's wonderful goodness to them in this late expedition, in preserving not only their own lives, but the lives of all the men of war that they had under their charge; so that, upon the review of their muster-roll, it appeared there was not one missing, v. 49. This was very extraordinary, and perhaps cannot be paralleled in any history. So many thousands of lives jeopardated in the high places of the field, and not one lost, either by the sword of the enemy or by any disease or disaster. This was *the Lord's doing*, and cannot but be marvellous in the eyes of those that consider how the lives of all men, especially soldiers, are continually in their hands. It is an evidence of the tender feeling which these commanders had for their soldiers, and that their lives were very precious to them, that they looked upon it as a mercy to themselves that none of those under their charge miscarried. *Of all that were given them they had lost none*; so precious also is the blood of Christ's subjects and soldiers to him, Ps. 72:14. 2. The pious acknowledgment they make for this favour: *Therefore we have brought an oblation to the Lord*, v. 50. The oblation they brought was out of that which *every man had gotten*, and it was gotten honestly by a divine warrant. Thus every man should lay by *according as God has prospered him*, 1 Co. 16:2. For where God sows plentifully in the gifts of his bounty he expects to reap accordingly in the fruits of our piety and charity. The tabernacle first, and the temple afterwards, were beautified and enriched with the spoils taken from the enemies of Israel; as by David (2 Sa. 8:11, 12), and his captains, 1 Chr. 26:26, 27. We should never take any thing to ourselves, in war or trade, which we cannot in faith consecrate a part of to God, who *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*; but, when God has remarkably preserved and prospered us, he expects that we should make some particular return of gratitude to him. As to this oblation, (1.) The captains offered it to *make an atonement for their souls*, v. 50. Instead of coming to Moses to demand a recompence for the good service they had done in *avenging the Lord of Midian*, or to set up trophies of their victory for the immortalizing of their own names, they bring an oblation to *make atonement for their souls*, being conscious to themselves, as the best men must be even in their best services, that they had been defective in their duty, not only in that instance for which they were reprov'd (v. 14),

but in many others; *for there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not.* (2.) Moses accepted it, and laid it up in the tabernacle *as a memorial for the children of Israel* (v. 54), that is, a monument of God's goodness to them, that they might be encouraged to trust in him in their further wars, and a monument of their gratitude to God (sacrifices are said to be memorials), that he, being well pleased with this thankful acknowledgment of favours bestowed, might continue and repeat his mercies to them.

## Chapter 32

In this chapter we have, I. The humble request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad for an inheritance on that side Jordan where Israel now lay encamped (v. 1-5). II. Moses's misinterpretation of their request (v. 6-15). III. Their explication of it, and stating it aright (v. 16-19). IV. The grant of their petition under the provisos and limitations which they themselves proposed (v. 20, etc.).

### Verses 1-15

Israel's tents were now pitched in the plains of Moab, where they continued many months, looking back upon the conquests they had already made of the land of Sihon and Og, and looking forward to Canaan, which they hoped in a little while to make themselves masters of. While they made this stand, and were at a pause, this great affair of the disposal of the conquests they had already made was here concerted and settled, not by any particular order or appointment of God, but at the special instance and request of two of the tribes, to which Moses, after a long debate that arose upon it, consented. For even *then*, when so much was done by the extraordinary appearances of divine Providence, many things were left to the direction of human prudence; for God, in governing both the world and the church, makes use of the reason of men, and serves his own purposes by it.

I. Here is a motion made by the Reubenites and the Gadites, that the land which they had lately possessed themselves of, and which in the right of conquest belonged to Israel in common, might be assigned to them in particular for their inheritance: upon the general idea they had of the land of promise, they supposed this would be about their proportion. Reuben and Gad were encamped under the same standard, and so had the better opportunity of comparing notes, and settling this matter between themselves. In the first verse the children of Reuben are named first, but afterwards the children of Gad (v. 2, 25, 31), either because the Gadites made the first motion and were most forward for it, or because they were the better spokesmen and had more of the art of management, Reuben's tribe still lying under Jacob's sentence, *he shall not excel*. Two things common in the world induced these tribes to make this choice and this motion upon it, the *lust of the eye* and the *pride of life*, 1 Jn. 2:16. 1. The *lust of the eye*. This land which they coveted was not only beautiful for situation, and pleasant to the eye, but it was good for food, food for cattle; and they had a great multitude of cattle, above the rest of the tribes, it is supposed because they brought more out of Egypt, than the rest did; but that was forty years before, and stocks of cattle increase and decrease in less time than that; therefore I rather think they had been better husbands of their cattle in the wilderness, had tended them better, had taken more care of the breed, and not been so profuse as their neighbours in eating the *lambs out of the flock* and the *calves out of the midst of the stall*. Now they, having these large stocks, coveted land proportionable. Many scriptures speak of Bashan and Gilead as places famous for cattle; they had been so already, and therefore these tribes hoped they would be so to them, and whatever comes of it here they desire to take their lot. The judicious Calvin thinks there was much amiss in the principle they went upon, and that they consulted their own private convenience more than the public good, that they had not such regard to the honour and interest of Israel, and the promise made to Abraham of the land of Canaan (strictly so called), as

they ought to have had. And still it is too true that many *seek their own things* more than the *things of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 2:21), and that many are influenced by their secular interest and advantage to take up short of the heavenly Canaan. Their spirits agree too well with this world, and with the things that are seen, that are temporal; and they say, "It is good to be here," and so lose what is hereafter for want of seeking it. Lot thus chose *by the sight of the eye*, and smarted for his choice. Would we choose our portion aright we must look above the things that are seen. 2. Perhaps there was something of the *pride of life* in it. Reuben was the first-born of Israel, but he had lost his birthright. Several of the tribes, and Judah especially, had risen above him, so that he could not expect the best lot in Canaan; and therefore, to save the shadow of a birthright, when he had forfeited the substance, he here catches at the first lot, though it was out of Canaan, and far off from the tabernacle. Thus Esau sold his birthright, and yet got to be served first with an inheritance in Mount Seir. The tribe of Gad descended from the first-born of Zilpah, and were like pretenders with the Reubenites; and Manasseh too was a first-born, but knew he must be eclipsed by Ephraim his younger brother, and therefore he also coveted to get precedence.

II. Moses's dislike of this motion, and the severe rebuke he gives to it, as a faithful prince and prophet.

1. It must be confessed that *prima facie—at first sight*, the thing looked ill, especially the closing words of their petition: *Bring us not over Jordan*, v. 5 (1.) It seems to proceed from a bad principle, a contempt of the land of promise, which Moses himself was so desirous of a sight of, a distrust too of the power of God to dispossess the Canaanites, as if a lot in a land which they knew, and which was already conquered, was more desirable than a lot in a land they knew not, and which was yet to be conquered: one bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. There seemed also to be covetousness in it; for that which they insisted on was that it was convenient for their cattle. It argued likewise a neglect of their brethren, as if they cared not what became of Israel, while they themselves were well provided for. (2.) It might have been of bad consequence. The people might have taken improper hints from it, and have suggested that they were few enough, when they had their whole number, to deal with the Canaanites, but how unequal would the match be if they should drop two tribes and a half (above a fifth part of their strength) on this side Jordan. It would likewise be a bad precedent; if they must have the land thus granted them as soon as it was conquered, other tribes might make the same pretensions and claims, and so the regular disposition of the land by lot would be anticipated.

2. Moses is therefore very warm upon them, which is to be imputed to his pious zeal against sin, and not to any peevishness, the effect of old age, for his meekness abated not, any more than his natural force. (1.) He shows them what he apprehended to be evil in this motion, that it would discharge the heart of their brethren, v. 6, 7. "What!" (says he, with a holy indignation at their selfishness) *"shall your brethren go to war*, and expose themselves to all the hardships and hazards of the field, and *shall you sit here at your ease?* No, do not deceive yourselves, you shall never be indulged by me in this sloth and cowardice." It ill becomes any of God's Israel to sit down unconcerned in the difficult and perilous concerns of their brethren, whether public or personal. (2.) He reminds them of the fatal consequences of the unbelief and faint-heartedness of their fathers, when they were just ready to enter Canaan, as they themselves now were. He recites the story very particularly (v. 8–13): *"Thus did your fathers*, whose punishment should be a warning to you to take heed of sinning after the similitude of their transgression."

(3.) He gives them fair warning of the mischief that would be likely to follow upon this separation which they were about to make from the camp of Israel; they would be in danger of bringing wrath upon the whole congregation, and hurrying them all back again into the wilderness (v. 14, 15): "*You have risen up in your fathers' stead* to despise the pleasant land and reject it as they did, when we hoped you had risen up in their stead to possess it." It was an encouragement to Moses to see what an increase of men there was in these tribes, but a discouragement to see that it was withal an increase of sinful men, treading in the steps of their fathers' impiety. It is sad to see the rising generation in families and countries not only no better, but worse than that which went before it; and what comes of it? Why, *it augments the fierce anger of the Lord*; not only continues that fire, but increases it, and fills the measure, often till it overflows in a deluge of desolation. Note, If men did but consider as they ought, what would be the end of sin, they would be afraid of the beginnings of it.

### **Verses 16-27**

We have here the accommodating of the matter between Moses and the two tribes, about their settlement on this side Jordan. Probably the petitioners withdrew, and considered with themselves what answer they should return to the severe reproof Moses had given them; and, after some consultation, they return with this proposal, that their men of war should go and assist their brethren in the conquest of Canaan, and they would leave their families and flocks behind them in this land: and thus they might have their request, and no harm would be done. Now it is uncertain whether they designed this at first when they brought their petition or no. If they did, it is an instance how often that which is honestly meant is unhappily misinterpreted; yet Moses herein was excusable, for he had reason to suspect the worst of them, and the rebuke he gave them was from the abundance of his care to prevent sin. But, if they did not, it is an instance of the good effect of plain dealing; Moses, by showing them their sin, and the danger of it, brought them to their duty without murmuring or disputing. They object not that their brethren were able to contend with the Canaanites without their help, especially since they were sure of God's fighting for them; but engage themselves to stand by them.

I. Their proposal is very fair and generous, and such as, instead of disheartening, would rather encourage their brethren. 1. That their *men of war*, who were fit for service, would go *ready armed before the children of Israel* into the land of Canaan. So far would they be from deserting them that, if it were thought fit, they would lead them on, and be foremost in all dangerous enterprises. So far were they from either distrusting or despising the conquest of Canaan that they would assist in it with the utmost readiness and resolution. 2. That they would leave behind them their families and cattle (which would otherwise be but the incumbrance of their camp), and so they would be the more serviceable to their brethren, v. 16. 3. That they would not return to their possessions till the conquest of Canaan was completed, v. 18. Their brethren should have their best help as long as they needed it. 4. That yet they would not expect any share of the land that was yet to be conquered (v. 19): "*We will not desire to inherit with them*, nor, under colour of assisting them in the war, put in for a share with them in the land; no, we will be content with our inheritance on this side Jordan, and there will be so much the more on yonder side for them."

II. Moses thereupon grants their request, upon consideration that they would adhere to their proposals. 1. He insists much upon it that they should never lay down their arms till their brethren laid down theirs. They promised to go armed *before the*

*children of Israel*, v. 17. "Nay," says Moses, "you shall go armed *before the Lord*, v. 20, 21. It is God's cause more than your brethren's, and to him you must have an eye, and not to them only." *Before the Lord*, that is, before the ark of the Lord, the token of his presence, which, it should seem, they carried about with them in the wars of Canaan, and immediately before which these two tribes were posted, as we find in the order of their march, ch. 2:10, 17. 2. Upon this condition he grants them this land for their possession, and tells them they shall be *guiltless before the Lord and before Israel*, v. 22. They should have the land, and neither sin nor blame should cleave to it, neither sin before God nor blame before Israel; and, whatever possessions we have, it is desirable thus to come guiltless to them. But, 3. He warns them of the danger of breaking their word: "If you fail, you *sin against the Lord* (v. 23), and not against your brethren only, and *be sure your sin will find you out*;" that is, "God will certainly reckon with you for it, though you may make a light matter of it." Note, Sin will, without doubt, find out the sinner sooner or later. It concerns us therefore to find our sins out, that we may repent of them and forsake them, lest our sins find us out to our ruin and confusion.

III. They unanimously agree to the provisos and conditions of the grant, and do, as it were, give bond for performance, by a solemn promise: *Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth*, v. 25. Their brethren had all contributed their assistance to the conquest of this country, which they desired for a possession, and therefore they owned themselves obliged in justice to help them in the conquest of that which was to be their possession. Having received kindness, we ought to return it, though it was not so conditioned when we received it. We may suppose that this promise was understood, on both sides, so as not to oblige all that were numbered of these tribes to go over armed, but those only that were fittest for the expedition, who would be most serviceable, while it was necessary that some should be left to till the ground and guard the country; and accordingly we find that about 40,000 of the two tribes and a half went over armed (Jos. 4:13), whereas their whole number was about 100,000.

#### **Verses 28-42**

Here, 1. Moses settles this matter with Eleazar, and with Joshua who was to be his successor, knowing that he himself must not live to see it perfected, v. 28-30. He gives them an estate upon condition, leaving it to Joshua, if they fulfilled the condition, to declare the estate absolute: "If *they will not go over with you*," he does not say "you shall give them no inheritance at all," but "you shall not give them this inheritance which they covet. if their militia will not come over with you, compel the whole tribes to come over, and let them take their lot with their brethren, and fare as they fare; *they shall have possessions in Canaan*, and let them not expect that the lot will favour them." Hereupon they repeat their promise to adhere to their brethren, v. 31, 32. 2. Moses settles them in the land they desired. He gave it to them for a possession, v. 33. Here is the first mention of the half tribe of Manasseh coming in with them for a share; probably they had not joined with them in the petition, but, the land when it came to be apportioned proving to be too much for them, this half tribe had a lot among them, perhaps at their request, or by divine direction, or because they had signalized themselves in the conquest of this country: for the children of Machir, a stout and warlike family, had taken Gilead and dispossessed the Amorites, v. 39. "Let them win it and wear it, get it and take it." And, they being celebrated for their courage and bravery, it was for the common safety to put them in this frontier-country. Concerning the settlement of these tribes observe, (1.) They built the cities, that is, repaired them, because either they had been

damaged by the war or the Amorites had suffered them to go to decay. (2.) They changed the names of them (v. 38), either to show their authority, that the change of the names might signify the change of their owners, or because their names were idolatrous, and carried in them a respect to the dunghill-deities that were there worshipped. Nebo and Baal were names of their gods, which they were forbidden to make mention of (Ex. 23:13), and which, by changing the names of these cities, they endeavoured to bury in oblivion; and God promises to take away the names of Baalim out of the mouths of his people, Hos. 2:17.

*Lastly*, It is observable that, as these tribes were now first placed before the other tribes, so, long afterwards, they were displaced before the other tribes. We find that they were carried captive into Assyria some years before the other tribes, 2 Ki. 15:29. Such a proportion does Providence sometimes observe in balancing prosperity and adversity; he sets the one over-against the other.

## Chapter 33

In this chapter we have, I. A particular account of the removals and encampments of the children of Israel, from their escape out of Egypt to their entrance into Canaan, forty-two in all, with some remarkable events that happened at some of those places (v. 1–49). II. A strict command given them to drive out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, which they were not going to conquer and take possession of (v. 50–56). So that the former part of the chapter looks back upon their march through the wilderness, the latter looks forward to their settlement in Canaan.

### Verses 1-49

This is a review and brief rehearsal of the travels of the children of Israel through the wilderness. It was a memorable history and well worthy to be thus abridged, and the abridgment thus preserved, to the honour of God that led them and for the encouragement of the generations that followed. Observe here,

I. How the account was kept: *Moses wrote their goings out*, v. 2. When they began this tedious march, God ordered him to keep a journal or diary, and to insert in it all the remarkable occurrences of their way, that it might be a satisfaction to himself in the review and an instruction to others when it should be published. It may be of good use to private Christians, but especially to those in public stations, to preserve in writing an account of the providences of God concerning them, the constant series of mercies they have experienced, especially those turns and changes which have made some days of their lives more remarkable. Our memories are deceitful and need this help, that we may *remember all the way which the Lord our God has led us in this wilderness*, Deu. 8:2.

II. What the account itself was. It began with their departure out of Egypt, continued with their march through the wilderness, and ended in the plains of Moab, where they now lay encamped.

1. Some things are observed here concerning their departure out of Egypt, which they are reminded of upon all occasions, as a work of wonder never to be forgotten. (1.) That they *went forth with their armies* (v. 1), rank and file, as an army with banners. (2.) Under the hand of Moses and Aaron, their guides, overseers, and rulers, under God. (3.) *With a high hand*, because God's hand was high that wrought for them, *and in the sight of all the Egyptians*, v. 3. They did not steal away clandestinely (Isa. 52:12), but in defiance of their enemies, to whom God had made them such a burdensome stone that they neither could, nor would, nor durst, oppose them. (4.) They went forth while the Egyptians were burying, or at least preparing to bury, their first-born, v. 4. They had a mind good enough, or rather bad enough, still to have detained the Israelites their prisoners, but God found them other work to do. They would have God's first-born buried alive, but God set them a burying their own first-born. (5.) To all the plagues of Egypt it is added here that *on their gods also the Lord executed judgments*. Their idols which they worshipped, it is probable, were broken down, as Dagon afterwards before the ark, so that they could not consult them about this great affair. To this perhaps there is reference, Isa. 19:1, *The idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence*.

2. Concerning their travels towards Canaan. Observe, (1.) They were continually upon the remove. When they had pitched a little while in one place they departed from that to another. Such is our state in this world; we have here no continuing city. (2.)

Most of their way lay through a wilderness, uninhabited, untracked, unfurnished even with the necessaries of human life, which magnifies the wisdom and power of God, by whose wonderful conduct and bounty the thousands of Israel not only subsisted for forty years in that desolate place, but came out at least as numerous and vigorous as they went in. At first they pitched *in the edge of the wilderness* (v. 6), but afterwards in the heart of it; by less difficulties God prepares his people for greater. We find them in the wilderness of Etham (v. 8), of Sin (v. 11), of Sinai, v. 15. Our removals in this world are but from one wilderness to another. (3.) They were led to and fro, forward and backward, as in a maze or labyrinth, and yet were all the while under the direction of the pillar of cloud and fire. He led them about (Deu. 32:10), and yet led them the right way, Ps. 107:7. The way which God takes in bringing his people to himself is always the best way, though it does not always seem to us the nearest way. (4.) Some events are mentioned in this journal, as their want of water at Rephidim (v. 14), the death of Aaron (v. 38, 39), the insult of Arad (v. 40); and the very name of *Kibroth-hattaavah—the graves of lusts* (v. 16), has a story depending upon it. Thus we ought to keep in mind the providences of God concerning us and our 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. Shittim, the place where the people sinned in the matter of Peor (ch. 25:1), is here called *Abel-shittim*. *Abel* signifies *mourning* (as Gen. 50:11), and probably this place was so called from the mourning of the good people of Israel on account of that sin and of God's wrath against them for it. It was so great a mourning that it gave a name to the place.

#### **Verses 50-56**

While the children of Israel were in the wilderness their total separation from all other people kept them out of the way of temptation to idolatry, and perhaps this was one thing intended by their long confinement in the wilderness, that thereby the idols of Egypt might be forgotten, and the people aired (as it were) and purified from that infection, and the generation that entered Canaan might be such as never knew those depths of Satan. But now that they were to pass over Jordan they were entering again into that temptation, and therefore, 1. They are here strictly charged utterly to destroy all remnants of idolatry. They must not only *drive out the inhabitants of the land*, that they may possess their country, but they must deface all their idolatrous pictures and images, and *pull down all their high places*, v. 52. They must not preserve any of them, no, not as monuments of antiquity to gratify the curious, nor as ornaments of their houses, nor toys for their children to play with, but they must destroy all, both in token of their abhorrence and detestation of idolatry and to prevent their being tempted to worship those images, and the false gods represented by them, or to worship the God of Israel by such images or representations. 2. They were assured that, if they did so, God would by degrees put them in full possession of the land of promise, v. 53, 54. If they would keep themselves pure from the idols of Canaan, God would enrich them with the wealth of Canaan. Learn not their way, and then fear not their power. 3. They were threatened that, if they spared either the idols or the idolaters, they should be beaten with their own rod and their sin would certainly be their punishment. (1.) They would foster snakes in their own bosoms, v. 55. The remnant of the Canaanites, if they made any league with them, though it were but a cessation of arms, would be *pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides*, that is, they would be upon all occasions vexatious to them, insulting them, robbing them, and, to the utmost of their power, making mischief among them. We must expect trouble

and affliction from that, whatever it is, which we sinfully indulge; that which we are willing should tempt us we shall find will vex us. (2.) The righteous God would turn that wheel upon the Israelites which was to have crushed the Canaanites: *I shall do to you as I thought to do unto them*, v. 56. It was intended that the Canaanites should be dispossessed; but if the Israelites fell in with them, and learned their way, they should be dispossessed, for God's displeasure would justly be greater against them than against the Canaanites themselves. Let us hear this, and fear. If we do not drive sin out, sin will drive us out; if we be not the death of our lusts, our lusts will be the death of our souls.

## Chapter 34

In this chapter God directs Moses, and he is to direct Israel, I. Concerning the bounds and borders of the land of Canaan (v. 1–15). II. Concerning the division and distribution of it to the tribes of Israel (v. 16, etc.).

### Verses 1-15

We have here a particular draught of the line by which the land of Canaan was meted, and bounded, on all sides. God directs Moses to settle it here, not as a geographer in his map, merely to please the curious, but as a prince in his grant, that it may be certainly known what passes, and is conveyed, by the grant. There was a much larger possession promised them, which in due time they would have possessed if they had been obedient, reaching even to the river Euphrates, Deu. 11:24. And even so far the dominion of Israel did extend in David's time and Solomon's, 2 Chr. 9:26. But this which is here described is Canaan only, which was the lot of the nine tribes and a half, for the other two and a half were already settled, v. 14, 15. Now concerning the limits of Canaan observe,

I. That it was limited within certain bounds: for God *appoints the bounds of our habitation*, Acts 17:26. The borders are set them, 1. That they might know whom they were to dispossess, and how far the commission which was given them extended (ch. 33:53), that they should *drive out the inhabitants*. Those that lay within these borders, and those only, they must destroy; hitherto their bloody sword must go, and no further. 2. That they might know what to expect the possession of themselves. God would not have his people to enlarge their desire of worldly possessions, but to know when they have enough, and to rest satisfied with it. The Israelites themselves must not be *placed alone in the midst of the earth*, but must leave room for their neighbours to live by them. God sets bounds to our lot; let us then set bounds to our desires, and bring our mind to our condition.

II. That it lay comparatively in a very little compass: as it is here bounded, it is reckoned to be but about 160 miles in length and about fifty in breadth; perhaps it did not contain more than half as much ground as England, and yet this is the country which was promised to the father of the faithful and was the possession of the seed of Israel. This was that little spot of ground in which only, for many ages, *God was known, and his name was great*, Ps. 76:1. This was the vineyard of the Lord, the garden enclosed; but, as it is with gardens and vineyards, the narrowness of the extent was abundantly compensated by the extraordinary fruitfulness of the soil, otherwise it could not have subsisted so numerous a nation as did inhabit it. See here then, 1. How small a part of the world God has for himself. Though the *earth is his, and the fullness thereof*, yet few have the knowledge of him and serve him; but those few are happy, very happy, because fruitful to God. 2. How small a share of the world God often gives to his own people. Those that have their portion in heaven have reason to be content with a small pittance of this earth; but, as here, what is wanting in quantity is made up in quality; *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*, Ps. 37:16.

III. It is observable what the bounds and limits of it were. 1. Canaan was itself a *pleasant land* (so it is called Dan. 8:9), and yet it bordered upon wilderness and seas, and was surrounded with divers melancholy prospects. Thus the vineyard of the church

is compassed on all hands with the desert of this world, which serves as a foil to it, to make it appear the more beautiful for situation. 2. Many of its borders were its defences and natural fortifications, to render the access of enemies the more difficult, and to intimate to Israel that the God of nature was their protector, and with his favour would *compass them as with a shield*. 3. The border reached to the *river of Egypt* (v. 5), that the sight of that country which they could look into out of their own might remind them of their bondage there, and their wonderful deliverance thence. 4. Their border is here made to begin at the *Salt Sea* (v. 3), and there it ends, v. 12. This was the remaining lasting monument of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. That pleasant fruitful vale in which these cities stood became a lake, which was never stirred by any wind, bore no vessels, was replenished with no fish, no living creature of any sort being found in it, therefore called the *Dead Sea*. This was part of their border, that it might be a constant warning to them to take heed of those sins which had been the ruin of Sodom; yet the iniquity of Sodom was afterwards found in Israel (Eze. 16:49), for which Canaan was made, though not a salt sea as Sodom, yet a barren soil, and continues so to this day. 5. Their western border was the *Great Sea* (v. 6), which is now called the *Mediterranean*. Some consider this sea itself to have been a part of their possession, and that by virtue of this grant, they had the dominion of it, and, if they had not forfeited it by sin, might have rode masters of it.

#### **Verses 16-29**

God here appoints commissioners for the dividing of the land to them. The conquest of it is taken for granted, though as yet there was never a stroke struck towards it. Here is no nomination of the generals and commanders-in-chief that should carry on the war; for they were to get the land in possession, *not by their own sword or bow, but by the power and favour of God*; and so confident must they be of victory and success while God fought for them that the persons must now be named who should be entrusted with the dividing of the land, that is, who should preside in casting the lots, and determine controversies that might arise, and see that all was done fairly. 1. The principal commissioners, who were of the *quorum*, were Eleazar and Joshua (v. 17), typifying Christ, who, as priest and king, divides the heavenly Canaan to the spiritual Israel; yet, as they were to go by the lot, so Christ acknowledges the disposal must be by the will of the Father, Mt. 20:23. Compare, Eph. 1:11. 2. Besides these, that there might be no suspicion of partiality, a prince of each tribe was appointed to inspect this matter, and to see that the tribe he served for was in no respect injured. Public affairs should be so managed as not only to give their right to all, but, if possible, to give satisfaction to all that they have justice done them. It is a happiness to a land to have the princes of their people meet together, some out of every tribe, to concert the affairs that are of common concern, a constitution which is the abundant honour, ease, and safety, of the nation that is blessed with it. 3. Some observe that the order of the tribes here very much differs from that in which they hitherto, upon all occasions, been named, and agrees with the neighbourhood of their lots in the division of the land. Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, the first three here named, lay close together; the inheritance of Dan lay next them on one side, that of Ephraim and Manasseh on another side; Zebulun and Issachar lay abreast more northerly, and, lastly, Asher and Naphtali most northward of all, as is easy to observe in looking over a map of Canaan; this (says bishop Patrick) is an evidence that Moses was guided by a divine Spirit in his writings. Known unto God are all his works beforehand, and what is new and surprising to us he perfectly foresaw, without any confusion or uncertainty.



## Chapter 35

Orders having been given before for the dividing of the land of Canaan among the lay-tribes (as I may call them), care is here taken for a competent provision for the clergy, the tribe of Levi, which ministered in holy things. I. Forty-eight cities were to be assigned them, with their suburbs, some in every tribe (v. 1-8). II. Six cities out of these were to be for cities of refuge, for any man that killed another unawares (v. 9-15). In the law concerning these observe, 1. In what case sanctuary was not allowed, namely, that of wilful murder (v. 16-21). 2. In what cases it was allowed (v. 22-24). 3. What was the law concerning those that took shelter in these cities of refuge (v. 25, etc.).

### Verses 1-8

The laws about the tithes and offerings had provided very plentifully for the maintenance of the Levites, but it was not to be thought, nor indeed was it for the public good, that when they came to Canaan they should all live about the tabernacle, as they had done in the wilderness, and therefore care must be taken to provide habitations for them, in which they might live comfortably and usefully. It is this which is here taken care of.

I. Cities were allotted them, with their suburbs, v. 2. They were not to have any ground for tillage; they needed not to *sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns*, for their heavenly Father fed them with the tithe of the increase of other people's labours, that they might the more closely attend to the study of the law, and might have more leisure to teach the people; for they were not fed thus easily that they might live in idleness, but that they might give themselves wholly to the business of their profession, and not be entangled in the affairs of this life. 1. Cities were allotted them, that they might live near together, and converse with one another about the law, to their mutual edification; and that in doubtful cases they might consult one another, and in all cases strengthen one another's hands. 2. These cities had suburbs annexed to them for their cattle (v. 3), a thousand cubits from the wall was allowed them for out-houses to keep their cattle in, and then two thousand more for fields to graze their cattle in, v. 4, 5. Thus was care taken that they should not only live, but live plentifully, and have all desirable conveniences about them, that they might not be looked upon with contempt by their neighbours.

II. These cities were to be assigned them out of the possessions of each tribe, v. 8. 1. That each tribe might thus make a grateful acknowledgment to God out of their real as well as out of their personal estates (for what was given to the Levites was accepted as given to the Lord) and thus their possessions were sanctified to them. 2. That each tribe might have the benefit of the Levites' dwelling among them, to *teach them the good knowledge of the Lord*; thus that light was diffused through all parts of the country, and none were left to sit in darkness, Deu. 33:10, *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments*. Jacob's curse on Levi's anger was, *I will scatter them in Israel*, Gen. 49:7. But that curse was turned into a blessing, and the Levites, by being thus scattered, were put into a capacity of doing so much the more good. It is a great mercy to a country to be replenished in all parts with faithful ministers.

III. The number allotted them was forty-eight in all, four out of each of the twelve tribes, one with another. Out of the united tribes of Simeon and Judah nine, out of Naphtali three, and four apiece out of the rest, as appears, Jos. 21. Thus were they

blessed with a good ministry, and that ministry with a comfortable maintenance, not only in tithes, but in glebe-lands. And, though the gospel is not so particular as the law was in this matter, yet it expressly provides that he that is *taught in the word* should *communicate unto him that teaches in all good things*, Gal. 6:6.

### Verses 9-34

We have here the orders given concerning the cities of refuge, fitly annexed to what goes before, because they were all Levites' cities. In this part of the constitution there is a great deal both of good law and pure gospel.

I. Here is a great deal of good law, in the case of murder and manslaughter, a case of which the laws of all nations have taken particular cognizance. It is here enacted and provided, consonant to natural equity,

1. That wilful murder should be punished with death, and in that case no sanctuary should be allowed, no ransom taken, nor any commutation of the punishment accepted: *The murderer shall surely be put to death*, v. 16. It is supposed to be done *of hatred* (v. 20), or *in enmity* (v. 21), upon a sudden provocation (for our Saviour makes rash anger, as well as malice prepense, to be murder, Mt. 5:21, 22), whether the person be murdered with an instrument of iron (v. 16) or wood (v. 18), or with a stone thrown at him (v. 17, 20); nay, if he smite him with his hand in enmity, and death ensue, it is murder (v. 21); and it was an ancient law, consonant to the law of nature, that *whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, Gen. 9:6. Where wrong has been done restitution must be made; and, since the murderer cannot restore the life he has wrongfully taken away, his own must be exacted from him in lieu of it, not (as some have fancied) to satisfy the manes or ghost of the person slain, but to satisfy the law and the justice of a nation; and to be a warning to all others not to do likewise. It is here said, and it is well worthy the consideration of all princes and states, *that blood defiles* not only the conscience of the murderer, who is thereby proved *not to have eternal life abiding in him* (1 Jn. 3:15), but also the land in which it is shed; so very offensive is it to God and all good men, and the worst of nuisances. And it is added that *the land cannot be cleansed* from the blood of the murdered, but by the blood of the murderer, v. 33. If murderers escape punishment from men, those that suffer them to escape will have a great deal to answer for, and God will nevertheless not suffer them to escape his righteous judgments. Upon the same principle it is provided that no satisfaction should be taken for the *life of a murderer* (v. 31): *If a man would give all the substance of his house* to the judges, to the country, or to the avenger of blood, to atone for his crime, it must *utterly be contemned*. The redemption of the life is so precious that it cannot be obtained by the *multitude of riches* (Ps. 49:6-8), which perhaps may allude to this law. A rule of law comes in here (which is a rule of our law in cases of treason only) that no man shall be put to death upon the testimony of one witness, but it was necessary there should be two (v. 30); this law is settled in all capital cases, Deu. 17:6; 19:15. And, *lastly*, not only the prosecution, but the execution, of the murderer, is committed to the next of kin, who, as he was to be the redeemer of his kinsman's estate if it were mortgaged, so he was to be the *avenger of his blood if he were murdered* (v. 19): *The avenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer*, if he be convicted by the *notorious evidence of the fact*, and he needed not to have recourse by a judicial process to the court of judgment. But if it were uncertain who the murderer was, and the proof doubtful, we cannot think that his bare suspicion, or surmise, would empower him to do that which the judges themselves could not do but upon the testimony of two witnesses. Only if the fact were plain then the next

heir of the person slain might himself, in a just indignation, slay the murderer wherever he met him. Some think this must be understood to be after the lawful judgment of the magistrate, and so the Chaldee says, "He shall slay him, *when he shall be condemned unto him by judgment*;" but it should seem, by v. 24, that the judges interposed only in a doubtful case, and that if the person on whom he took vengeance was indeed the murderer, and a wilful murderer, the avenger was innocent (v. 27), only, if it proved otherwise, it was at his peril. Our law allows an appeal to be brought against a murderer by the widow, or next heir, of the person murdered, yea, though the murderer have been acquitted upon an indictment; and, if the murderer be found guilty upon that appeal, execution shall be awarded at the suit of the appellant, who may properly be called *the avenger of blood*.

2. But if the homicide was not voluntary, nor done designedly, if it was *without enmity, or lying in wait* (v. 22), not *seeing* the person or not *seeking his harm* (v. 23), which our law calls chance-medley, or homicide *per infortunium—through misfortune*, in this case there were cities of refuge appointed for the manslayer to flee to. By our law this incurs a forfeiture of goods, but a pardon is granted of course upon the special matter found. Concerning the cities of refuge the law was, (1.) That, if a man killed another, in these cities he was safe, and under the protection of the law, till he had his trial *before the congregation*, that is, before the judges in open court. If he neglected thus to surrender himself, it was at his peril; if the avenger of blood met him elsewhere, or overtook him loitering in his way to the city of refuge, and slew him, his blood was upon his own head, because he did not make use of the security which God had provided for him. (2.) If, upon trial, it were found to be willful murder, the city of refuge should no longer be a protection to him; it was already determined: *Thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die*, Ex. 21:14. (3.) But if it were found to be by error or accident, and that the stroke was given without any design upon the life of the person slain or any other, then the man-slayer should continue safe in *the city of refuge*, and the avenger of blood might not meddle with him, v. 25. There he was to remain in banishment from his own house and patrimony *till the death of the high priest*; and, if at any time he went out of that city or the suburbs of it, he put himself out of the protection of the law, and the avenger of blood, if he met him, might slay him, v. 26–28. Now, [1.] By the preservation of the life of the man-slayer God would teach us that men ought not to suffer for that which is rather their unhappiness than their crime, rather the act of Providence than their own act, for *God delivered him into his hand*, Ex. 21:13. [2.] By the banishment of the man-slayer from his own city, and his confinement to the city of refuge, where he was in a manner a prisoner, God would teach us to conceive a dread and horror of the guilt of blood, and to be very careful of life, and always afraid lest by oversight or negligence we occasion the death of any. [3.] By the limiting of the time of the offender's banishment to the death of the high priest, an honour was put upon that sacred office. The high priest was to be looked upon as so great a blessing to his country that when he died their sorrow upon that occasion should swallow up all other resentments. The cities of refuge being all of them Levites' cities, and the high priest being the head of that tribe, and consequently having a peculiar dominion over these cities, those that were confined to them might properly be looked upon as his prisoners, and so his death must be their discharge; it was, as it were, at his suit that the delinquent was imprisoned, and therefore at his death it fell. *Actio moritur cum persona—The suit expires with the party*. Anisworth has another notion of it, That as the high priests, while they lived, by their service and

sacrificing made atonement for sin, wherein they prefigured Christ's satisfaction, so, at their death, those were released that had been exiled for casual murder, which typified redemption in Israel. [4.] By the abandoning of the prisoner to the avenger of blood, in case he at any time went out of the limits of the city of refuge, they were taught to adhere to the methods which Infinite Wisdom prescribed for their security. It was for the honour of a remedial law that it should be so strictly observed. How can we expect to be saved if we neglect the salvation, which is indeed a great salvation!

II. Here is a great deal of good gospel couched under the type and figure of the cities of refuge; and to them the apostle seems to allude when he speaks of our *fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us* (Heb. 6:18), and being *found in Christ*, Phil. 3:9. We never read in the history of the Old Testament of any use made of these cities of refuge, any more than of other such institutions, which yet, no doubt, were made use of upon the occasions intended; only we read of those that, in dangerous cases, took hold of *the horns of the altar* (1 Ki. 1:50; 2:28); for the altar, wherever that stood, was, as it were the capital *city of refuge*. But the law concerning these cities was designed both to raise and to encourage the expectations of those who looked for redemption in Israel, which should be to those who were convinced of sin, and in terror by reason of it, as the cities of refuge were to the man-slayer. Observe, 1. There were several cities of refuge, and they were so appointed in several parts of the country that the man-slayer, wherever he dwelt in the land of Israel, might in half a day reach one or other of them; so, though there is but one Christ appointed for our refuge, yet, wherever we are, he is a refuge at hand, a very present help, for *the word is nigh us* and Christ in the word. 2. The man-slayer was safe in any of these cities; so in Christ believers that flee to him, and rest in him, are protected from the wrath of God and the curse of the law. *There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus*, Rom. 8:1. Who shall condemn those that are thus sheltered? 3. They were all Levites' cities; it was a kindness to the poor prisoner that though he might not go up to the place where the ark was, yet he was in the midst of Levites, who would teach him the good knowledge of the Lord, and instruct him how to improve the providence he was now under. It might also be expected that the Levites would comfort and encourage him, and bid him welcome; so it is the work of gospel ministers to bid poor sinners welcome to Christ, and to assist and counsel those that through grace are in him. 4. Even strangers and sojourners, though they were not native Israelites, might take the benefit of these cities of refuge, v. 15. So in Christ Jesus no difference is made between Greek and Jew; even the *sons of the stranger* that by faith flee to Christ shall be safe in him. 5. Even the suburbs or borders of the city were a sufficient security to the offender, v. 26, 27. So there is virtue even in the hem of Christ's garment for the healing and saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace. 6. The protection which the man-slayer found in the city of refuge was not owing to the strength of its walls, or gates, or bars, but purely to the divine appointment; so it is the word of the gospel that gives souls safety in Christ, *for him hath God the Father sealed*. 7. If the offender was ever caught struggling out of the borders of his city of refuge, or stealing home to his house again, he lost the benefit of his protection, and lay exposed to the avenger of blood; so those that are in Christ must abide in Christ, for it is at their peril if they forsake him and wander from him. *Drawing back is to perdition*.

## Chapter 36

We have in this chapter the determination of another question that arose upon the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. God had appointed that they should inherit, ch. 27:7. Now here, I. An inconvenience is suggested, in case they should marry into any other tribe (v. 1-4). II. It is prevented by a divine appointment that they should marry in their own tribe and family (v. 5-7), and this is settled for a rule in like cases (v. 8, 9); and they did marry accordingly to some of their own relations (v. 10–12), and with this the book concludes (v. 13).

### Verses 1-4

We have here the humble address which the heads of the tribe of Manasseh made to Moses and the princes, on occasion of the order lately made concerning the daughters of Zelophehad. The family they belonged to was part of that half of the tribe of Manasseh which we yet to have their lot within Jordan, not that half that was already settled; and yet they speak of the land of their possession, and the inheritance of their fathers, with as great assurance as if they had it already in their hands, knowing whom they had trusted. In their appeal observe, 1. They fairly recite the former order made in this case, and do not move to have that set aside, but are very willing to acquiesce in it (v. 2): *The Lord commanded to give the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters*; and they are very well pleased that it should be so, none of them knowing but that hereafter it might be the case of their own families, and then their daughters would have the benefit of this law. 2. They represent the inconvenience which might, possibly, follow hereupon, if the daughters of Zelophehad should see cause to marry into any other tribes, v. 3. And it is probable that this was not a bare surmise, or supposition, but that they knew, at this time, great court was made to them by some young gentlemen of other tribes, because they were heiresses, that they might get footing in this tribe, and so enlarge their own inheritance. This truly is often aimed at more than it should be in making marriages, not the meetness of the person, but the convenience of the estate, to *lay house to house, and field to field. Wisdom indeed is good with an inheritance*; but what is an inheritance good for in that relation without wisdom? But here, we may presume, the personal merit of these daughters recommended them as well as their fortunes; however, the heads of their tribe foresaw the mischief that would follow, and brought the case to Moses, that he might consult the oracle of God concerning it. The difficulty they start God could have obviated and provided against in the former order given in this case; but to teach us that we must, in our affairs, not only attend God's providence, but make use of our own prudence, God did not direct in it till the themselves that were concerned wisely foresaw the inconvenience, and piously applied to Moses for a rule in it. For though they were chief fathers in their families, and might have assumed a power to overrule these daughters of Zelophehad in disposing of themselves, especially their father being dead and the common interest of their tribe being concerned in it, yet they chose rather to refer the matter to Moses, and it issued well. We should not covet to be judges in our own case, for it is difficult to be so without being partial. It is easier in many cases to take good advice than to give it, and it is a satisfaction to be under direction. Two things they aimed at in their representation:—(1.) To preserve the divine appointment of inheritances. They urged the command (v. 2), that the land should be given by lot to the respective tribes, and urged that it would break in upon the divine appointment if such a considerable part

of the lot of Manasseh should, by their marriage, be transferred to any other tribe; for the issue would be denominated from the father's tribe, not the mother's. This indeed would not lessen the lot of the particular persons of that tribe (they would have their own still), but it would lessen the lot of the tribe in general, and render it less strong and considerable; they therefore thought themselves concerned for the reputation of their tribe, and perhaps were the more jealous for it because it was already very much weakened by the sitting down of the one half of it on this side Jordan. (2.) To prevent contests and quarrels among posterity. If those of other tribes should come among them perhaps it might occasion some contests. They would be apt to give and receive disturbance, and their title might, in process of time, come to be questioned; and how great a matter would this fire kindle! It is the wisdom and duty of those that have estates in the world to settle them, and dispose of them, so as that no strife and contention may arise about them among posterity.

### **Verses 5-13**

Here is, I. The matter settled by express order from God between the daughters of Zelophehad and the rest of the tribe of Manasseh. The petition is assented to, and care taken to prevent the inconvenience feared: *The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well*, v. 5. Thus those that consult the oracles of God concerning the making of their heavenly inheritance sure shall not only be directed what to do, but their enquiries shall be graciously accepted, and they shall have not only their *well done*, but their *well said*, good and faithful servant. Now the matter is thus accommodated: these heiresses must be obliged to marry, not only within their own tribe of Manasseh, but within the particular family of the Hephherites, to which they did belong. 1. They are not determined to any particular persons; there was choice enough in the family of their father: *Let them marry to whom they think best*. As children must preserve the authority of their parents, and not marry against their minds, so parents must consult the affections of their children in disposing of them, and not compel them to marry such as they cannot love. Forced marriages are not likely to prove blessings. 2. Yet they are confined to their own relations, that their inheritance may not go to another family. God would have them know that the land being to be divided by lot, the disposal whereof was of the Lord, they could not mend, and therefore should not alter, his appointment. The inheritances must *remove from tribe to tribe* (v. 7), lest there should be confusion among them, their estates entangled, and their genealogies perplexed. God would not have one tribe to be enriched by the straitening and impoverishing of another, since they were all alike the seed of Abraham his friend.

II. The law, in this particular case, was made perpetual, and to be observed whenever hereafter the like case should happen, v. 8. Those that were not heiresses might marry into what tribe they pleased (though we may suppose that, ordinarily, they kept within their own tribe), but those that were must either quit their claim to the inheritance or marry one of their own family, that each of the tribes might keep to its own inheritance, and one tribe might not encroach upon another, but throughout their generations there might remain immovable the ancient landmarks, set, not by their fathers, but by the *God of their fathers*.

III. The submission of the daughters of Zelophehad to this appointment. How could they but marry well, and to their satisfaction, when God himself directed them? They married their father's brothers' sons, v. 10–12. By this it appears, 1. That the marriage of cousin-germans is not in itself unlawful, nor within the degrees prohibited, for then God would not have countenanced these marriages. But, 2. That ordinarily it is not advisable; for, if there had not been a particular reason for it

(which cannot hold in any case now, inheritances being not disposed of as then by the special designation of Heaven), they would not have married such near relations. The world is wide, and he that walks uprightly will endeavour to walk surely.

IV. The conclusion of this whole book, referring to the latter part of it: *These are the judgments which the Lord commanded in the plains of Moab* (v. 13), these foregoing, ever since ch. 26, most of which related to their settlement in Canaan, into which they were now entering. Whatever new condition God is by his providence bringing us into, we must beg of him to teach us the duty of it, and to enable us to do it, that we may do the work of the day in its day, of the place in its place.