

Revelation and Response

Num. 1: 1, 2; 7: 1-3, 89; 8: 1-7; Gal. 5: 22-26.

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I have in mind to engage your thoughts with two principles which are as true in the New Testament as they are in the Old, *revelation* — from God to men, and *response* to that revelation — from men to God. The revelation that God has made in this dispensation is greater than anything He had made known to men in former times. It must be so, for what God has declared of Himself today in Christianity has reached us through the Son, His last and greatest communication, as we see in Hebrews 1. Moreover, in the power of the Holy Spirit of God we are enabled to answer to that revelation, giving a living response to it for the pleasure of God. Through the gospel God has drawn us to Himself and by so doing has delivered us from this present evil world. If the light which has shone into our souls holds us in our affections, no attraction in this world will turn us aside or draw us back into that state of things where men are going on to perdition. These typical passages in Numbers together with the one in the New Testament will, we hope, give us some light on this matter.

The book of Numbers is the book of experience, but it may be of help to see its setting in the Scriptures. It is preceded by two other books, so far as the history of the nation of Israel is concerned. Their history as a nation begins in the book of Exodus, the book of redemption, where we have the first outstanding type of the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This appears to be the first offering of sin offering character in the Scriptures. Typically it would suggest the moment when we first apprehended and appreciated what Peter calls "the precious blood of Christ," when in the need of our souls we turned to Christ and gladly accepted Him as our Saviour. There can be no progress at all in the things of God unless we begin there, of that we are assured. Then in the latter half of Exodus we have the interesting details of the construction of the tabernacle, God dwelling amongst the people He had redeemed and brought to Himself. These appear to be the two outstanding features of that book.

Then follows the book of Leviticus, where the great thought is approach to God. Only redeemed people can know what it is to draw near to God without fear. In that day it was representatively in Aaron, but the response of the people in drawing nigh to God is clearly seen there. The book opens with the statement that God spoke "out of the tabernacle of the congregation," and He immediately gives instructions as to how and when His people could draw nigh to Him. We have details of the offerings which describe for us in type the service and sacrificial work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In answer to this have we not in our souls the consciousness that, as the fruit of the work of Christ which has put away our sins for ever, removing every question which stood between our souls and God, we can now draw near to God in the faith of our souls. Exodus is thus the book of redemption and Leviticus the book of approach.

In the book of Numbers we have the record of the experiences of the people of God in wilderness conditions, a people who have been redeemed and brought to God. In the first ten chapters we have the setting of the whole camp and the service of God connected with it; first the ordering of the host in detailing to each tribe where they were to camp; then the selection of the tribe of Levi in view of service in the tabernacle. We have read of the leaders, the princes of the tribes, those whom God ordained to take a lead amongst His people. We have also read of Moses the mediator of the whole divine system, and of Aaron who sustained it as representing the people Godward, and all this is connected with the people of God in wilderness conditions. We need to take account of these features if

we are to be in our true place and to move in this world as pleasurable to God.

A sad feature of this book is the continuous failure of the people, and there may be the tendency with us to be so engrossed with the failures of the people of God that we miss the grandeur of what is in them in spite of the failures. I have noticed that one hundred and ten times in this book the tabernacle of the congregation is mentioned. Does it not seem that God was indicating His presence with them in spite of their many failures? He never abandoned them, and His desire to meet with them never altered, for the cloud of glory overshadowing the tent would ever indicate that He was still in their midst. That is where we need to fix our eyes, not on the failures. Do not think I minimize the failures, far from it, but I have found that people who constantly talk about failures make very little progress in the things of God. God is still with His people and His resources are still available for those who desire to answer to His mind and who seek to walk before Him for His pleasure. It is this we are seeking to press at the moment, God made known and dwelling with His people, and their answer to that in responsive affection.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt," ch. 1: 1.

Note these two prepositions — *in* the wilderness, *out* of Egypt. Beloved, there is no wilderness in Egypt nor can we have Egypt in the wilderness. It is idle to talk about being in the wilderness unless we are morally out of Egypt. Can you really say from the depths of your soul, what a grand thing it is to be out of this world? If we have appreciated the call of God as we ought to have done, we shall be able to speak so. Do we value the manna above the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic (Num. 11: 5)? The wilderness is a place where there is no path, and the desert is a place where there is no provision. Both terms are used of the wilderness of Sinai and would shew us that we are entirely shut up to God. If the call of God has turned this world into a wilderness for us, why should we be looking for a path there? Why should we be looking for food there? We have every resource in God, with the daily manna and the cloud to guide continually. The path for us is clearly outlined in the Word of God, and Christ is our food. If we wish to know experimentally what it is to walk in communion with God in the power of the Spirit and enjoy to the full the wonderful salvation of God, we must needs turn our back upon this world and accept wilderness conditions with God Himself ever at hand. There was no tent of meeting — the real meaning of the tabernacle of the congregation — in Egypt, but God is ever near to those who are in practice out of Egypt and in the wilderness.

In Num. 7 we read "And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them," verse 1. We pause to consider this remarkable picture. The word "fully" means completely. Here then we have a complete divine anointed system, a picture of Christianity in all its details as available to us in the power of the Spirit of God, and all established in Christ at the right hand of God in glory. We may well thank God for the gift of the Spirit, for we could not understand one whit of this apart from the Spirit of God. A spiritual order has come into being today, completely established and anointed in the power of the Spirit of God, and by the grace of God we have all been brought into it. Moreover we read, "and sanctified it." The wilderness is characterized by disorder and defilement with its bones and its dead bodies, yet in spite of that there was a sanctified sphere in which God dwelt with His people in infinite grace. In spite of the corruption around us on every hand there is a new spiritual order into which we have been brought apart altogether from the corruption, and this is what we have in the wilderness to sustain and guide us. May we avail ourselves of it at all times!

In this 7th chapter we see that the first people to move towards the tent of meeting were the princes, the leaders of the people. There is such a thing as leadership among the people of God, and if we are to make progress in our souls we need to pay attention to this. We read there were twelve princes, the heads of each of the tribes, so that not one tribe was without leadership. The answer to this for us would be, "Obey them that have the rule over you" or "Obey your leaders," Heb. 13: 17 (N. Tr.). We are wise if we acknowledge such leaders, for they watch for our souls. I do not think gift is leadership, that comes out more in relation to the Levites further on as we hope to see. Leadership is local, and we do well to recognize those definitely enabled of God to maintain in the gatherings the truth which God has given to us. What is put to their credit in this chapter is, they brought gifts to sanctify the altar. The claims of God are represented by the altar, and the first thing said of these princes is that when the tabernacle was completely set up, they had regard for the rights of God. Let us thank God for those who have both the light and the energy necessary to promote what they know to be due to God in the gatherings, and who seek to preserve the saints from the corruptions around us on every hand, knowing that if these things have place in the meetings they will rob us of the liberty which is ours and the enjoyment of the things of God.

In the end of Num. 7 and the beginning of Num. 8, we have two outstanding things brought to our notice, the *voice* and the *light*. "And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him (i.e. God) then he heard the voice of One speaking unto him (i.e. Moses) from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and he spake unto Him," Num. 7: 89. Why did Moses go in to commune with God? It was to receive these divine communications to pass them on to the people. He received them in the immediate presence of God, within the veil and from the throne of God from between the two cherubim, and the voice of God gave to him orally the instructions He would have passed on to His people. Here again we have a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ through Whom, as we read in Hebrews 1, the voice of God has reached us. Greater than Moses indeed, for through this wonderful Person God has spoken Son-wise. He was ever in the immediate presence of God, and coming forth from that presence into Manhood has spoken in divine authority, and has brought into being the divine, heavenly, spiritual system we now belong to.

"Forth from that eternal brightness
Thoughts of love divine have come —
Brought from thence by One Who loves us,
Who would have us there at home."

Moses is a type of the Lord Jesus, One Who is in living communion with God, co-equal, co-eternal with God, and Who has come forth from the immediate presence of God to give to us divine communications for our enlightenment and guidance. Thus Moses, communicating what he heard by that voice, evidences the feature of revelation, while Aaron with the lampstand in the next chapter represents the side of response. Together they typify "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," Heb. 3: 1.

At the beginning of chapter eight we read that the first communication which Moses received was to instruct Aaron in regard to the lampstand. "Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him, When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick," Num. 8: 2. We find a footnote by J.N.D. in the New Translation to the effect that the phrase "lightest the lamps" really means "caused to ascend." This term is also used in relation to the burnt offering and also to the incense on the golden altar. In each case it is "caused to ascend," and conveys the thought that what is being wrought is first of all for the pleasure of God. Let us seek to keep that before us in our service for God; causing it to

ascend first of all, consciously seeking the pleasure of God, and it will give character to service as nothing else could, and will deliver us from serving only for the brethren to see. It is recorded of Ishmael that before he was born the angel said to Hagar his mother "he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren," Gen. 16: 12. Again it is recorded of him, "he died in the presence of all his brethren," Num. 25: 18. Abraham did plead with God, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee," but Ishmael did not live before God, he had no secret history with God, but died as he lived, "in the presence of all his brethren." In our service for God let us do what He wants us to do, and do it for His eye first, not merely to produce an effect with the brethren — cause it to ascend.

Aaron is instructed to light the lamps and so cause the light to ascend in the holy place. Typically two features are seen in relation to the oil. As the anointing oil it is indicative of *power*, but in the lamps it is indicative of *light* in the holy place. We need both these things in our service for God. Light without power would leave us helpless to answer to the light; power without light would leave us in perplexity as not knowing what to do; but power with light enables us to go on intelligently in the service of our God. The Holy Spirit dwelling in each member of the Christian company gives guidance and power to all who seek to serve God and move in the wilderness for His pleasure, but while speaking of each individual we must keep in mind that there is to be unity in this service. There were seven lamps (seven conveys the idea of perfection or completeness) but there was only *one* light, not seven lights. If our service for God is right it will not clash with others, but will blend with them in a united service in the light of the holy place. One answer to this seven branched lampstand is found in Isa. 11: 2 where seven qualities are seen prophetically blended together in our Lord Jesus Christ, forming one light in its perfection. Moses then gives the instruction, and in answer to it Aaron lights the lamps that the light might ascend. Here we have the two thoughts of our subject brought together; revelation seen in Moses, response in Aaron.

Aaron received through Moses this divine communication — "And the LORD spake," and in Num. 8: 3 in answer to that, "Aaron did so." He was *obedient* to that communication. Be assured of this beloved, it is useless talking about response if we are not obedient to the voice of God. One has said "That which is light becomes law to us," and that is very true. If we do not answer to the light God gives us we shall not receive more. If we ignore His voice and refuse to walk in obedience to that which God communicates to us, we need not wonder if we are not progressing in the things of God. That which Moses said to Aaron became a commandment to him for we read, "And Aaron did so; he lighted the lamps thereof over against the candlestick, as the LORD *commanded* Moses," verse 3. The communication became to him a command, and in obedience to God he did as he was commanded. This is the path of true progress.

We further read in verse 4, "And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work; according unto the pattern which the LORD had *shewed* Moses, so he made the candlestick." In this word "shewed" we have the thought of "illumination," and this is the main thought connected with the light. Moses was the one to whom the pattern was shewn, but it is connected with the other two matters mentioned earlier in this passage. That which begins as a divine communication (verse 1), becomes a command (verse 3), and leads to illumination (verse 4), light in our souls. In its application, first we hear what God has to say to us, then through grace we answer to it, and so we grow in the knowledge of God as Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints, "being enlightened in the eyes of your heart," Eph. 1: 18 (New Trans.).

It is of interest to note that the voice and the light, revelation and response, precede the account of the cleansing of the Levites, the opening verses of which we have read together. They are called to serve God in relation to the "tent of meeting," and thus typify those who are gifted to carry on the

service of God. If we read Eph. 4, we find all are in this matter. All are not apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors, or teachers, but all have some gift, some spiritual impression from Christ, as we read in verse 7, "But unto *every one* of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Each has something of spiritual value formed in the soul by the Spirit, something which is needed amongst the saints of God. Let us not neglect it but rather guard it in secret history with God, and we shall then find how and where it can be of most use to the saints of God.

If gift is to be of real use in the service of God we must observe certain conditions, and these are described for us in this account of the cleansing of the Levites. "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them," verse 6. There must be practical sanctification if we are to rightly serve in regard to a sanctified tent of meeting, and we read here how that is brought about. "And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them; Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean," verse 7. Moses first sprinkled the purifying water upon them, but the rest of the actions in this verse were done by the Levites themselves, "let them shave . . . let them wash . . . make themselves clean." The water of purifying is indicative of being born again and is seen no doubt in John 3, where the Lord tells Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The first right desires we had after God began when that work had been effected in our souls, a work done *for* us by the Spirit; but that was to be followed by a work done *by* us as we clearly see in this typical passage. To shave all our flesh means in New Testament language, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh" (2 Cor. 7: 1); to wash our clothes means separation from the circles in which we once moved ere the grace of God reached us, as again we read, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord," 2 Cor. 6: 17. First the razor on the flesh, then external cleansing from defiling associations in which once we walked. Only as obedient to these exhortations can we take up service for God in relation to a sanctified sphere. Only as we judge ourselves in the light of the cross of Christ shall we be prepared to sever ourselves from all external defiling influences.

In closing we turn to the verse we read in Galatians 5: 22-26. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law." This is the ninefold fruit which ought to characterize us as sanctified, and it will do so if we have acted upon the next verse. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Here is an example of the meaning for us of the razor on "all their flesh." Certain things connected with the flesh appeal to us while other things horrify us, but in the power of the Spirit of God we crucify the flesh with its appealing things as well as its corrupt things. We live in the Spirit and are exhorted here to walk in the Spirit. A sad catalogue of the works of the flesh is given to us a few verses earlier in the chapter, but as walking in the Spirit we shall be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. This is how we respond to the revelation which God has given to us; He has given us of His Spirit that we may do so.

May we truly answer to these things, and thus shew that we do appreciate the movement which God has made towards us. By so doing we shall receive increased light into our souls, and be a help and blessing to our brethren, while at the same time enjoying more fully all that God has called us into by His infinite grace.