

From the Exodus-Through the Life of David

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the journey of Israel from the Exodus through the life of David, emphasizing God's provision, commandments, and the importance of faithfulness.

Scripture: Exodus 16:4, Exodus 20:3

Topics: "God's Provision", "Obedience and Trust"

Description

J.R. Miller explores the journey of the Israelites from the Exodus to the life of David, emphasizing God's provision and guidance through trials, such as the giving of manna and the establishment of the Ten Commandments. He highlights the importance of trust in God during hardships, the significance of obedience to His commands, and the dangers of idolatry as seen in the worship of the golden calf. Miller draws parallels between the experiences of the Israelites and the life of David, illustrating how faithfulness and reliance on God lead to blessings and guidance. He encourages believers to recognize God's daily provisions and to maintain a heart of gratitude and obedience.

Transcript

Devotional Hours with the Bible

J. R. Miller, 1909

Volume 2.

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The Giving of Manna

Exodus 16, Numbers 11

The people of Israel had now entered upon their forty years of discipline. During this period they were to be made into a nation. This wider purpose should be kept in mind in all our studies of the incidents of the wandering in the wilderness. The people were to be trained to trust God and to obey Him.

The first experience recorded was at MARAH. There, in great thirst, after three days of desert journey, they came upon springs to which they eagerly rushed, only to find the water bitter, unfit to drink. A tree growing close by was cut down and cast into the waters, at once sweetening them. Thus a lesson in trust was taught--God was leading them and He would not fail to provide for their needs.

Often in life, God's children come to bitter springs. What promised to be experiences of refreshing, prove to be disappointing. Human lives have many sorrows. But always close by the bitter spring--grows the tree which will sweeten it. Many interpret the tree of Marah to mean the cross of Christ. The gospel has comfort for all in any trouble. Dr. Fairbairn speaks of the words of Christ as a handful of spices cast into the world's bitter streams and sweetening them.

After leaving Marah, the people journeyed to ELIM, where they found an oasis with twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. Life is not all disappointment and bitterness. Troubles pass away. Joy comes after sorrow.

Moving farther into the inhospitable wilderness, the people soon found themselves needing bread. They had already forgotten the lesson of Marah--the kindness of God in providing for their needs--and began to murmur! Again God's answer to their ungrateful complaining was love--a new mercy. "I will rain bread from heaven for you."

"In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, there on the desert surface were fine flakes, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, 'What is it?' because they didn't know what it was. Moses told them, 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.'" Exodus 16:13-15

MANNA was a substance which fell with the dew. For forty years, manna was rained about the camps of the Hebrews, until they reached Canaan and had the natural products of the fields for food. It fell in small grains, like white frost flakes; and in taste like thin flour-cakes with honey. It was gathered every morning, except on the Sabbath, and in place of this--a double portion fell on Friday morning. If kept over-night, it became corrupt except on the Sabbath. Manna was the principal part of the food of the people all the forty years. As a perpetual memorial of this miracle, a golden pot of it was laid up in the ark.

God always has some way to provide for the needs of His people. He is not limited to ordinary means. He never works needless miracles. He did not send manna while the people were in Goshen, because there was no need for it then. But here in the wilderness, where food could not be gotten in any ordinary way, He supplied it supernaturally.

"Yes," someone says, "that was the age of miracles--but we cannot expect God to provide for us in these days--as He did then for Israel." The answer is that God's love is just as watchful and as faithful now--as it was in the days of miracles. We may always with perfect confidence depend on our Father to provide for us in some way--when we are following His guidance. Indeed, it is God who feeds us every day--just as

really as it was God who gave the people the manna each morning. We do not call it a miracle when our daily morning meal is spread for us--yet it is no less God who gives it to us--than if a separate miracle were wrought each morning to feed us.

'Give us this day our dally bread.'

Back of the loaf--is the snowy flour,

And back of the flour--the mill;

And back of the mill--is the wheat, and the shower,

And the sun, and the Father's will.

Something was given to the people to do--even when the bread was supplied supernaturally. "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." Exodus 16:4

They were not to lay up in store--but were taught to live simply by the day. When night came, they did not have a supply of food left over for the next day--but were entirely dependent upon God's new supply to come in the morning.

In this method of providing, God was teaching all future generations a lesson. When the Master gave the disciples the Lord's Prayer, He put this same thought of life into it, for He taught us to say: "Give us this day--our daily bread."

This is a most valuable lesson for every Christian to learn. We should make a little fence of trust around each day, and never allow any care or any anxiety to break in. God does not provide in advance for our needs. We cannot get grace today--for tomorrow's duties; and if we try to bear tomorrow's cares and burdens today--we shall break down in the attempt.

TIME comes to us, not in years, not even in weeks--but in little days. We have nothing to do with 'life in the aggregate' --that great bulk of duties, anxieties, struggles, trials and needs, which belong to a year or even to a month. We really have nothing to do even with tomorrow.

Our sole business is with the one little day now passing, and the one day's burdens will never crush us; we can easily carry them until the sun goes down. We can always get along for one short day--and that is really, all we ever have.

The Divine purpose in all this experience comes out here, "In this way I will test them, to see whether or not they will follow My instructions." God is always testing us. Trials test us--whether or not we will submit with humility and obedience to the experiences that are sore and painful. Life's needs test us--whether we will trust God in the time of extremity or not.

None the less, do the gifts and favors of God test us. They test our gratitude. Joy tests us as well as sorrow. Some people forget God, when all things go well and they have only prosperity. Do we remember God always--as the Giver of each new blessing? Are we grateful to Him for all that we receive? These favors also test our faith. Do we still lean on Him--while we have plenty? Ofttimes one who turns to God when help is needed--fails to look to Him when the hand is full. The Divine mercies also test our obedience. Do we obey God as carefully and follow Him as closely and trustingly, when our tables are

full--as when the pressure of poverty or need drives us to Him? Every day is a probation for us.

In the midst of this great mercy of manna, God taught the people to remember the Sabbath. On the sixth day they were to gather and prepare twice as much food as on other days. The reason was that on the Sabbath no work was allowed. No manna fell on that day. There are several interesting things to notice here. While on other days, any manna stored up--would rot; the extra day's portion gathered on the sixth day remained fresh and pure for use on the Sabbath. Still further, on the morning of the Sabbath, no manna fell as on other days. Thus God taught the sacredness of His own day.

He teaches us also here that in order to keep the day as it ought to be kept, we should prepare for it the day before. The people were to gather the Sabbath's portion on the sixth day. There would seem to be in this provision and preparation in advance, a suggestion of the way we may best observe our Christian Sabbath. Some of us remember certain old-fashioned times in the country, when on Saturday evening careful preparations were made for the Sabbath, so that there would be no needless work done on the Lord's Day. Wood was cut and carried in, all the implements of worldly labor were put away, boots and shoes were cleaned and blackened, coffee was ground and food cooked, so far as possible--in a word, everything was done that could be done beforehand to insure the most restful Sabbath possible. This old-fashioned custom is a good one to keep in vogue always. Very much of Sabbath enjoyment and profit, will always depend upon the measure of preparation we make for it in advance.

The Lord spoke of this manna miracle as an exhibition of His glory. "At evening, then you shall know that the Lord has brought you out from the land of Egypt; and in the morning, then you shall see the glory of the Lord!" The supply of food was an exhibition of God's glory. We may see the same glory in every evening's and morning's blessings, which a thoughtful Providence brings to us. We think only of the unusual, or the supernatural, as manifesting the glory of God. We forget that this Divine glory is shown just as really and as wonderfully in every day's new blessings. The miracle of God's daily Providence is infinitely more stupendous, than the feeding of a prophet for a few months from an inexhaustible handful of meal; the feeding of five thousand in Galilee with a few loaves and fishes; or even the feeding of a nation with manna for forty years. If the single special miracle shows glory, what does the great continuous miracle of each day's common blessings, year after year, and century after century, show?

Let us learn to see the glory of God in every piece of bread which comes to our table, in every drop of water which glistens on a leaf in the morning sun, in every blade of grass and bursting bud and blooming flower in field or garden.

One special lesson that God wished the people to learn--was trust. So He rebuked their complainings and murmurings when they found fault, and became afraid when they had hardships to meet. "The Lord hears your murmurings which you murmur against Him!" Exodus 16:8. This is startling! Does God really hear every discontented word we speak? Does He hear when we grumble about the weather, about the hard winter, about the late spring, about the dry summer, about the wet harvest? Does He hear when we fret and murmur about the drought, about the high winds, about the storms? Does He hear when we complain about our circumstances, about the hardness of our lot, about our losses and disappointments?

If we could get into our hearts and keep there continually, the consciousness that every word we speak is heard in heaven, and falls upon God's ears before it falls upon any other ear--would we murmur as we now do? We are always on our guard when we think anyone we love and honor is within hearing, and speak only proper words then. Are we as careful what we say in the hearing of our Father? We are careful,

too, never to speak words which would give pain to the hearts of those we love dearly. Are we as careful not to say anything that will give pain to Christ?

There are many interesting points of analogy, between the manna and Christ.

The manna is called "bread from heaven." "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever!" John 6:51

The manna was indispensable--without it the people would have perished. Without Christ our souls must perish.

The manna was a free gift from God--there was nothing to pay for it. Christ is God's gift, coming to us without money and without price.

Yet the manna had to be gathered by the people, Christ must be received and appropriated by personal faith. "Take, eat," runs the formula of the holy communion. The bread is offered to us--but we must take it and we must eat it. So must we take Christ when He is offered to us.

The manna came in great abundance, enough for all. Just so, there is such abundance in Christ that He can supply all the needs of my soul, and of every soul who will feed upon Him. No one ever came hungry to Him--and found no bread.

Manna had to be gathered each day, a supply for that one day. We must feed upon Christ daily. We cannot lay up supplies of grace for any future. We cannot feed tomorrow, on today's bread.

The manna had to be gathered early, before the heat of the sun melted it. We should seek the blessings of Christ's grace in life's early morning before the hot suns of care and trial beat upon us.

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20

Mount Sinai became the meeting-place of God and the people of Israel. The Lord met Moses on the mountain and told him that He would reveal Himself in a thick cloud, and speak to him in a voice that the Israelites would hear. Solemn preparations were made for the great event. Bounds were set, inside of which no one should pass--on penalty of death. On the third day, the promised revelation came. There were thunders and lightnings, and a cloud enveloping the mountain. Then out of the midst of the magnificent scene, God spoke to the assembly of Israel, the Ten Commandments as the basis of His covenant with them.

The commandments are of Divine origin. The Lord based the obligation of the people to obey these commandments, on what he had done for them. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Everywhere we find the footprints of God. Life is full of His goodness and mercy. When we think of what He has done for us--we cannot but recognize His right to command us. All the hopes of the Israelites had come from God's deliverance. Once they were slaves--and He had set them free. Had it not been for His love for them, and His power put forth in their behalf--they would still have been slaves in Egypt! He had redeemed them--and now they were a free people, on their way to a land in which they would grow into a great nation.

"You shall have no other gods before Me." The commandments are given in the second person singular, "You shall." God's law deals with individuals and comes to each one personally and separately.

The first commandment requires that God shall have the first place in our life. The opening words in the Bible are suggestive: "In the beginning God." We should put Him first and keep Him first in all our life.

Every person has some 'god'. Our god is that which rules us, that which we love, obey, live for, and reverence. We talk with pity of the idolatry of heathen nations. But there are idolaters nearer to us--than India or China. In whatever heart the true God is not worshiped, some false god is. Is the God of the Scriptures, indeed our God? Do we love Him above all persons and all things? Is He really first in all our thoughts, affections, plans and hopes?

It is not enough that we give Him the first place in our creed, saying: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord." If lip confession is all we have to give Him, He cares nothing for it. What is God to our hearts, to our consciences, to our wills? Do we trust Him? What is He to us? How much would we lose out of our life--if we were to cease to trust Him? Then it is not trust only that God asks--He claims also our worship and obedience. "If you love Me," said Jesus, "you will keep My commandments." This first commandment ought to start a great many searching questions in our hearts as we study it.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:4-6

This commandment does not forbid the arts of painting and sculpture, for even in the tabernacle, carved figures were placed. What is forbidden is the worship of God under any form or image. When God says that He is jealous, and visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, He does not mean that He punishes the children for the evil that their fathers have done. Each one must bear his own burden of guilt. But sin casts long shadows. It does not stop with him who commits it. Parents who are tempted to do wrong, should think that besides bringing punishment upon themselves, they are also sowing seeds of hurt and curse for the children they love.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless, who takes His name in vain." There are many ways of taking God's name in vain. One is to use it without reverence and love.

One tells of a miner, with grimy hand, plucking a pure, sweet flower. It seemed unfit, almost a desecration, for the lovely flower to be held in the soiled hand. How infinitely more of a desecration is it when in trivial speech we speak the name of God! The ancient Hebrews would, never utter the sacred name of Jehovah; they said it was too holy to be taken upon human lips. In some parts of the East, the Mohammedans will not tread upon the smallest piece of paper which they see lying on the ground. They say it may have on it the name of God. If we only thought more of the holiness and majesty of God--we would surely honor His name more thoughtfully. Even Christians are oftentimes careless in the use of God's name in their speech.

One common application of this commandment, is to profanity in speech. Even boys who are but learning to lisp their early words, are heard using the Divine name in awful oaths and cursing. Men who claim to be

cultured and refined, speak the name of God profanely, using it to give emphasis to their speech.

All the universe honors God's name. The stars as they shine, flash His praise. The storm, the sunshine, the towering mountains, the sweet valley, the thunder peal, the whisper of evening, the sweet flowers--all honor God. Man alone profanes, dis-hallows and blasphemes the blessed name. Profanity is a sin which brings no pleasure, no gain; it does not adorn one's speech--but disfigures it. There seems to be no reason for it--but contempt of God in human hearts.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:8-11

Many people seem to forget God's day. The day is like all other days to them. They do their work just as on week days. Or if they do not work, they take the time for worldly pleasure. It is time we should be reminded again, of what God has said about the Sabbath.

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." There are many reasons why we should honor our parents. We owe a great deal to them. They watched over us through years of helpless infancy. They toiled, suffered and sacrificed for us. They bore patiently with all our faults. They took the storms of life themselves, that they might shelter us. Perhaps they appear a little faded and old-fashioned to our keen, critical eyes. But if so, we should not forget how it all came about. It was in caring for us--that they lost their freshness and vigor.

The Brittany peasants give this beautiful legend of the way the robin got its red breast: When Jesus was being led out to crucifixion, bearing His cross and wearing His crown of thorns--a bird, pitying Him, flew down and plucked a thorn from His brow. The blood from the wound gushed out and splashed the bird's breast. Ever since that day the robin has borne this mark of its pity for the suffering Christ. This is only a legend--but it teaches a beautiful lesson. We should ever be eager to pluck out the thorns which are piercing the brows of our mother and father. Some children, however, by their careless life or by their neglect, weave circlets of thorns for the brows of those whom they ought to love and bless!

Jesus gave us the highest example of honor to parents, in the way He showed His love to His mother. It was a sweet friendship that existed between this mother and her Holy Son. He opened His soul to her--and she gave not a mother's love only--but also a mother's counsel, and strong, inspiring help. Then His love overshadowed her to the last. One of the seven sayings spoken while He hung on the cross told of His faithful affection for her. The world would be desolate for her when her Son was gone. So He made provision for her in the shelter of a love in which He knew she would be safe. As He saw her led away by the beloved disciple to his own home--part of the pain of dying was gone from His own heart. His mother would have gentle care.

"You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13. So long as we interpret this commandment only with bare literalness, it does not give us much trouble. Not many of us have ever killed anybody. But when we read into it the meaning that our Lord gave it in His Sermon on the Mount we find that it is not so easy to keep it. God looks into the heart, and He may find the spirit of murder there--when no hand is raised to strike. All bitterness, malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, uncharitableness, and all angry thoughts, dispositions and feelings--are the beginnings of murder.

There are many ways in which we may indirectly injure the lives of others. The dealer adulterates the food he sells, and the preparations act as slow poisons, secretly destroying the lives of those who use the food. A mother allows her children to violate the laws of health, to eat unwholesome food, to be irregular in their rest and exercise. By-and-by, they sicken and perhaps die. She wonders then at the strange ways of Providence and asks why it is that God so afflicts her. The plumber does careless work, and diphtheria finds its way into a home. The builder is negligent, and a wooden beam lies too close to the flue, and one night catches fire, leaving death in the ruins of the home. We are our brothers' keepers, and any failure in our guardianship leaves guilt on our souls.

When the old Hebrews built a house, they were required by law to put a fence round the flat roof, lest someone might fall off and be injured or killed. So we should not only guard against harming others directly--but should also construct our whole life and influence so that no one may indirectly receive injury from us.

"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14. The seventh commandment also searches the heart, taking cognizance of the thoughts, feelings, desires, affections and imaginations. We must learn to guard our thoughts if we would please God. "Blessed are the pure in heart." One part of true religion, as James defines it, is to keep one's self "unspotted from the world." Lilies float in the black water of a bog--and yet remain pure and white, without spot or stain. So by the grace of Christ, every young person should try to live a pure and heavenly life in the world--but unspotted by the world's evil.

"You shall not steal." Exodus 20:15. There are many ways of stealing without deliberately putting one's hand into a neighbor's pocket and abstracting his gold or silver. The postmaster had failed to cancel the stamp on a letter, and the young girl who received it peeled off the stamp and used it again to send a reply to her friend. She thought she had done a smart thing--she did not see the eighth commandment broken under her feet. A boy went to the store for a pound of coffee. The shopkeeper was hurried, and in his haste gave him five cents too much change. The boy ran home chuckling over the mistake in great glee, because the grocer had cheated himself. He did not think that while the man had made an honest mistake--he himself was a thief. A man borrows money from a friend. He promises to return it next Tuesday. But he never returns it at all. He often thinks of it--but as his generous friend does not ask him for it--he never attempts to pay his debt. He supposes he is a debtor--he never thinks for a moment that he is a thief.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Exodus 20:16. There is probably not a large amount of false witnessing in courts of justice. Even wicked men are afraid to lie under oath. But there is a vast amount of lying about other people, which is done in the ordinary conversation of the street, the office, the parlor. Anything is false witnessing, which misrepresents another or puts him in a wrong light. Taking up any evil report which we hear and repeating it again, is really bearing false witness. Our neighbor's good name is a jewel which we should sacredly guard. The best rule is never to say anything unkind of another, even if it be true. It might stop much of the fashionable talk of society--but that is of little matter; the world would not be greatly the loser.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20:17. The tenth commandment forbids the sin of covetousness, and teaches the duty of contentment. A Roman Catholic priest said that among all the thousands of 'confessions' which had been made to him, no one had confessed the sin of covetousness. Yet probably no sin is so common, no one of the commandments is so

often broken.

One of the best proofs of the Christian spirit, is the ability to rejoice in the success and prosperity of others. Does it make us glad to see our neighbor possessing good things--or does it make us envious? Do we rejoice in his prosperity, or do we begrudge his good things to him and wish they were ours instead? Does other people's happiness or success--make us happy or discontented? When we look down to the root of things, we discover that many crimes start just in the simple desire to have something that is not ours. "I saw, I coveted, I took!" told the whole story of Achan's sin.

Worshiping the Golden Calf

Exodus 32

Moses continued long in the Mount receiving instructions from God concerning the institutions of religion which were to be established in Israel. Meanwhile, what were the people doing in their camps at the foot of the Mount? While God was providing for them with such wise and loving thought, planning for their national life and giving them laws for their government, they grew weary of the absence of their leader, became restless and began to look back towards their old life. This shows the influence that Moses had over the Israelites and how much he meant to them. So long as he was with them--they were willing to follow his counsel and obey the Lord. But when he was absent and when his absence, though on their behalf and for their sake, was long continued, they forgot his teachings and in their hearts began to tire of serving the Lord.

Many people are good as long as another good person is beside them to influence and direct them. But when their friend passes out of their life they drift away into wrong ways. Many a boy begins a downward course--at his mother's coffin or by his father's grave. Many a Sunday-school scholar drops out of a class and begins to drift towards the world--when a faithful teacher goes away. Many departures from God begin--when a young man goes out from his old home and from under the influence of the household life and associations. The losing of a friend--is oftentimes the beginning of decay in moral and spiritual life.

There is a story of a man who had formed the drinking habit. One day he met a friend and said to him: "When I am with you I have no desire to drink, and if I come into your presence when the desire is upon me--it is instantly overcome. If I could come to you always when I am tempted--I would not fall." The friend told him to come to him at any hour of the day or night, and he would gladly help him. The invitation was accepted, and again and again a little talk in the friend's office and a little prayer--sent the struggler with temptation out brave and strong for victory. For years the young man never once fell. At length his friend died. Then when the temptation came again he had no place to go and found no voice to cheer him, no hand to hold him up--and fell back into his old sin!

Whatever human friends may do to help us, we need Christ, too. A man is often a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest--but we need more than a man, else when the man is missing, there will be no one to help. The strongest human friendship will some day pass out of our life, and then if we have not Christ--we shall fall.

The Israelites had been used to seeing other nations worship images, and they longed, too, for some visible image of God. The worship of the Lord they had been taught was pure and holy, while idolatry gave license to human passions. Discouraged by the long absence of Moses, and their hearts turning back again towards the world's ways, they came to Aaron, saying: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before

us." We can easily find fault with the Hebrews--but are we much better?

We make our covenants and promises to serve God--do we keep them? In young people's societies the members pledge themselves to do certain things, and each month renew their pledge at their consecration service. Are none of these covenants ever broken? Christian people solemnly dedicate all they have and all they are to Christ. At every communion service they renew their promise and pledge of consecration. Do they never forget these promises and violate these covenants?

Of course, there are temptations--but temptations are meant to be opportunities for victory and growth. Instead of yielding, we should be victorious through God's help, and in every victory we gain we shall become stronger ourselves. Temptations are never reasons for falling. They are only testings of our faithfulness, and everyone of them ought to be an occasion for victoriousness. When God permits as to be tempted--He does not want us to yield and fall into sin. His thought for us, is that in the testing, we shall endure and be proved true; and that in the resisting, we shall gain new experience and new power to stand faithful.

Aaron showed strange weakness in this crisis. Those who are set to be leaders of others have a tremendous responsibility. Other eyes are upon them, and for them to falter or prove weak--will be to draw other lives with them downward. One fine qualification was mentioned in Aaron when he was appointed to help Moses, "He can speak well." But eloquence is not enough in one who stands for God. Moses was slow of speech--but he could stand like a rock. If he had been in Aaron's place that day--the people would not have dared suggest a calf of gold, or if they had done so--they would have been met by such an answer that they would never again have thought of such a departure from God.

Aaron, however, seems not to have offered even a word of opposition or resistance to the suggestion made by the people. He assented to their request without even a protest or a single effort to keep them from sin. "Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden rings . . . and bring them unto me." Some writers suppose that Aaron thought the people would not grant the request he made for their jewelry. But if this is true, it still shows Aaron's weakness. It is never safe to parley in such a case as this.

In the absence of Moses, Aaron was the responsible leader of the people. If he had boldly told them of the sin they were thinking of committing, speaking out with stern denunciation of it as Moses would have done--he would certainly have turned the tide of feeling, and saved them from their great sin. By yielding, however, even though he hoped to defeat their intentions in some other way, he showed his own pitiable weakness, and opened the way for the great flood of evil which came in upon the nation. We should learn to stand like a rock in all matters of duty or principle. We are all leaders of some others. People come to everyone of us with their questions about this or that thing, which they are thinking of doing. If it is wrong--we should unequivocally tell them so, and refuse to lend our encouragement to the sin.

The people were so eager to have the golden calf--that they did not hesitate to do as Aaron requested. The women loved their jewels--but in their enthusiasm, they were ready to give them up. "All the people broke off the golden rings . . . and brought them unto Aaron." When the work of Christ demands self-denial or sacrifice, no matter how costly--we should be ready to make it. When the things we love most deeply and cherish most sacredly are asked of us--they should be given up at once for God. Idolatry, wherever it is practiced, shows a measure of devotion and a spirit of sacrifice--that are not always found among the followers of Christ.

When the idol was ready, the people said to each other: "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" They, did not mean to turn away from the Lord--but to worship Him under the visible form of the golden calf. What they claimed to be doing, was the making of an image to represent the true God who had blessed them so much, and whom they wished to honor. It was the second commandment, not the first, therefore, which they specially broke. They had been forbidden to make or to worship any graven image. God desired purely spiritual worship. It is not likely that any of us will make images and worship them as gods--but whatever we put in the place of God in our hearts, as the first object of our thought, love and obedience, becomes an idol to us! We should guard carefully against this sin. God alone should be worshiped.

The incident of the golden calf shows how easy it is to turn away from God. The way of obedience is a straight and narrow way. It lies along the path of the commandments. The Israelites turned aside from this path--and walked in ways of sin. God has made the way still more plain for us. We have conscience, the Bible, Christian friends and teachers, and the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we certainly know the way. Yet many of us are continually turning aside. God is then grieved--and trouble and sorrow come upon those who forget Him.

The story of God's anger and the intercession of Moses for the people, as told in this chapter, is full of instruction. We see what a fearful thing sin is. Moses hastened down when he was told that the people had corrupted themselves, and in his anger dashed the tablets of stone from him and broke them, when he found the people engaged in heathen rites. "When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain!" He then destroyed the calf, rebuked Aaron, and calling for those on the Lord's side to gather about him, he sent them to slay the leaders in the idolatrous rebellion.

Moses' faithfulness in dealing with the people after their sin, teaches us a great lesson. "You have sinned a great sin! I will go up unto the Lord; perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin." They had broken their covenant with God, and in doing so had forfeited the favor and blessing which God had promised them on the condition of obedience. There was only one hope--Moses would intercede for them.

When we break our covenants with God--we have the same way--it is the only way--to get back into divine favor. It is a privilege to have human friends who will go up into the mount of prayer and plead with God for our forgiveness when we have sinned. The Lord's words to Moses when he told Him of the people's sin, reveal the almost omnipotent power of intercession. "Let Me alone," God said, "so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them!" If there had been no intercession, if God had been left alone, they would have been blotted from the earth because of their great sin. It was only the pleading of Moses for them that saved them.

We cannot know what blessings come to us, and what woes and penalties are averted, through the intercession of our friends. No duty of love is more sacred, than that of praying for those we love. Especially should we pray for them if they have sinned, that they may be forgiven. Not to make intercession for them, then, is to leave them to receive the reward of their evil-doing without any plea on their behalf. But precious to us as are human mediators and intercessors, there is something better yet--Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us. When we have sinned, He is our Advocate with the Father.

The pleading of Moses for the people, shows what a great heart of love he had. "But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written!" It is doubtful if Moses himself knew precisely what he meant when he prayed thus. The prayer came out of a great heart bursting with sorrow and with love. So much we know, however, that Moses was willing to make any sacrifice, even to lay down his own life, that he might save his people from the doom which their sin had brought upon them. Jesus Christ not only was willing to lay down His life--but actually gave His life, making Himself an offering for sin, that He might redeem His people!

Sin brings sorrow. "The Lord sent a great plague upon the people because they had worshiped the calf." The sin was forgiven--but not all the consequences were averted. God spared the people--but He punished them for their wickedness. It is always so. The pardon of God does not save us from all the effects of our sin. The wounds may be healed--but the scars remain. Many a good Christian bears all through his years--the marks of his early sins. God forgave David's sin--but the forgiveness did not take away all the consequences. The child of Bathsheba died, and then through all David's life, retribution followed him, the same sins which he had committed reappearing in his own family, leaving their blight and curse upon his home!

The Tabernacle

Exodus 40

The tabernacle was not built after the plans of any human architect. Moses did not design it himself. It was made according to the pattern shown in the Mount. We must worship God, not according to our own ideas of propriety and taste--but according to the Divine directions.

The Divine instructions for building the tabernacle were definite and minute--but the work was to be done by human hands. The people were to contribute to the cost. Offerings were to be invited from the people--gems and jewels, precious metals, skins and yarns, spices and oils. Everyone among the people should have the privilege of contributing. The tabernacle was to be built with free and voluntary gifts.

The tabernacle was not like our modern churches, either in its form or in its purpose. It was not a place where the people came together to sing and pray and hear God's Word. Indeed, the people never entered the tabernacle at all. None but the priests were allowed inside the sacred tent. It was really God's dwelling-place.

The tabernacle was a type or illustration of Christ. God dwelt in a tent in the midst of His people. When Christ came He was the Word, God Himself, dwelling not then in a tent but in human flesh. His name was Emmanuel, God with us. There is an evident allusion to this first tabernacle, in the words of the writer of the Fourth Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt, tabernacled, among us." We do not need the symbol any more, since we have the reality.

The tabernacle also showed the way of access to God. There the people came with their sacrifices and offerings, their prayers, their needs and sorrows, finding God ready to answer and help.

The tabernacle also taught God's holiness, for none but the priest was permitted to enter it. We can come to God only through Jesus Christ our High Priest. "No man comes unto the Father--but by Me."

The furniture of the tabernacle consisted of four pieces:

the ark of the covenant,
the table with its bread and wine,
the seven-branched candlestick,
and the golden altar of incense.

First there was the ark of the testimony. This was only a box or chest, made of acacia wood--but it was the center of the whole sacred shrine. In it were placed the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. The covering of this ark was not a mere lid--but a most sacred part of the furniture. It was made of pure gold, indicating its sacredness. It represented the very throne of God, and there He sat to receive the confessions and the praises of all the people.

It was a mercy seat, for God is a God of mercy. When people come to Him they are not coming to a God who is angry, who will not forgive, whose look is a consuming fire. He is a holy and righteous God--but also a God who is gracious and compassionate. The approach to the mercy seat was made always by the high priest with blood, which told of atonement. The cross of Christ is now our mercy seat!

Above the mercy seat appeared the Shekinah-glory, the Presence of God, on which no eye could look except when beneath it, hiding the accusing law, is the mercy seat. Just how much all this meant to the worshiping Hebrew, we cannot tell; to us, however, the meaning is clear. Christ is our High Priest. He made His offering of Himself on the altar and then passed through the veil and appeared before God with His own blood, which He offered there and thus obtained eternal redemption for us.

The high priest went into the Holy of Holies, not for himself only, but for all the people. He bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate and thus represented them all. When he passed into the Holy of Holies, and stood before the Shekinah, all the people stood there in him. There is access for us to the mercy seat--but only through Christ.

The priest could stand before the mercy seat only when he had made an offering on the altar and bore the blood of the sacrifice to sprinkle on the golden lid. That is, access to God could be had only after atonement had been made. This, too, has its plain teaching for us. Jesus Christ could open the way for us into God's presence--only by making an atonement for us. When He was dying on the cross, the veil which, until this time, had shut men away from God's presence was torn apart. This rending of the veil was not accidental--but symbolized the truth that now the way to God had been fully opened. There is no longer any need of a priest--Christ Himself is our great High Priest, ever standing before God and making intercession for us.

There was also a table in the tabernacle. "You shall bring in the table, and set in order the things that are upon it." This was the table of the show-bread. It was overlaid with pure gold, surrounded with a border of gold. The table was furnished with dishes, on which, every Sabbath, twelve loaves of bread were laid. These remained there for seven days, and when replaced by new loaves were given to the priests to be eaten by them. Besides the bread, there were vessels on the table, no doubt containing wine. These provisions had their spiritual meaning.

A table is spread for God's children wherever they are. Christ not only redeems His people by His blood--but He offers Himself also as bread, the bread of life. In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray for our daily bread, and the promise is given that our Father will provide for all our needs. The tabernacle was

God's House, and the table spread in it gave it the character of a home. It tells of the fellowship of love. Our Father brings us into His very family and causes us to sit with Him and commune with Him. The table suggests also the abundance of the provision which Christ makes for us. We have the same picture perpetuated in the Lord's Supper. Friends of Christ gather as a family and sit down together with their Lord. All this points forward to still another scene, when all God's children one day shall gather as one family in heaven.

Another article of the furniture in the tabernacle was a candlestick or lampstand. The lampstand represented the Church. There was only one central stem, indicating the unity of the Church. Then there were seven branches, each one with its lamp, indicating the multiplicity of God's people. The lighted lamps burning in the darkness of the tabernacle symbolized believers, who shine as lamps in this dark world.

Jesus says to His disciples: "You are the light of the world." Every Christian should shine to make one little spot of the earth brighter. We are brightened, that we may brighten. All this was beautifully and impressively taught here at the beginning, in this Divine picturing of religion. We have it made clearer still in the vision of Zechariah. The oil is supplied without human agency--but the light shines in the lamps; that is, in the human lives which are Divinely lighted. The Church is to shine as the aggregate of all its individual members. If one little lamp goes out or shines dimly, one spot in the world is left unlighted or only dimly lighted.

Another thing in the furniture of the tabernacle was the golden altar for the incense. Incense was an emblem of prayer. There are several suggestions. For one thing, there was a Divine prescription for making the incense. "Take fragrant spices--gum resin, onycha and galbanum--and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred." Any compound different from that described was not acceptable.

There is also a Divine prescription for prayer. We are clearly taught how we must pray, of what ingredients we must mix our incense.

The fire used on the golden altar must be holy fire from the altar of burnt offering. Prayer is not a sweet savor unto God, unless it is kindled by the fire of God's love and by the Holy Spirit. Burning incense was fragrant; true prayer was sweet perfume before God. As the fragrance of flowers is pleasing to us, arising from forests, meadows, fields and gardens in the summer days; so is the prayer of earth which ascends from the homes and sanctuaries, from secret closets and from supplicating hearts.

The incense was offered by the priest within the Holy Place, while the people were praying without. Christ in heaven offers our prayers before God, purifying them and adding to them the incense of His own sacrifice, and then presenting them, sweetened by His own intercession.

Outside the tabernacle there was another altar--the altar of burnt offering. This altar was the first object the worshiper saw as he approached the sacred tent. It stood guard over the way to the Holy Place. No one could enter the tabernacle, to reach God's presence, except by the way of the altar of burnt offering. It thus pictures Christ's cross. Before we can gain access to God--we must stop at the cross and find forgiveness of sins. An unforgiven soul--has no access to God. The cross is the gate and the only gate, which opens to new life and to glory.

There was also a laver outside the tabernacle. It was placed between the altar and the tabernacle door. After sacrificing upon the altar, the priest must stop at the laver and wash before he entered the Holy

Place. We need not only the blood of Christ to atone for our guilt--but also the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. The altar of burnt offering told of justification, and the laver told of sanctification.

When the tabernacle was set up, it and all its vessels and furniture must be anointed. Nothing was ready for use, though all things had been made after the Divine pattern, until anointed with holy oil. There was a Divine prescription also for the making of this sacred oil: "Collect choice spices--12½ pounds of pure myrrh, 6¼ pounds each of cinnamon and of sweet cane, 12½ pounds of cassia, and one gallon of olive oil. Blend these ingredients into a holy anointing oil." With this oil, the tabernacle and its furniture were to be anointed. This anointing made the place holy. After this it would have been sacrilege to use the tabernacle or any of its vessels for any common service.

Our lives, when anointed by the Holy Spirit, are sacred to God, and should not be used in any profane or unholy service.

There is a story of an artist who had made a noble representation in marble of the Redeemer and who afterwards refused to make any figures of any but sacred subjects. He was requested to make statues of heathen goddesses for ornaments--but he said his art was now consecrated to God. "The hands that have cut the figure of the Christ in marble," he said, "must not carve anything that is not holy." So we may say that the lips that speak Christ's name in prayer--should utter none but holy words. The hearts which are temples of the Holy Spirit--should not entertain any impure or unworthy guests. Whatever is touched by the consecrating oil of Divine grace--must never be profaned by any unholy use.

Aaron and his sons were appointed priests. They were washed with water, symbolizing their spiritual cleansing in preparation for their sacred work. Then upon them were put the holy garments. These garments had their typical meaning.

For example, on each shoulder, in the golden clasp that fastened the two parts of the ephod, was an onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of six of the tribes of Israel--six on one stone and six on the other. Thus the high priest bore all the people on his shoulder--the place of strength and upholding.

Again, the priest's breastplate had in it twelve precious stones, with the names of the twelve tribes cut in them, on each stone the name of one tribe. This breastplate the priest wore over his heart, the place of love. Thus he bore the people in this typical way on his shoulders for support and upholding, and on his heart for affection and cherishing. Thus Christ, who is our High Priest, bears all His people on His shoulder for uplifting, and on His heart in tender, unchanging love.

Nadab and Abihu

Leviticus 10:1-11

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered strange fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD." Leviticus 10:1-2

The incident of Nadab and Abihu is the story of a sin which casts a shadow over the beginnings of the tabernacle worship. These young priests were presumptuous, elated by the new honor conferred upon them, and, besides, were probably under the influence of wine. Swift and terrible punishment came upon them for their sin, the essence of which was that they disregarded definite Divine instructions and took

their own way instead of God's. It was right to offer incense--but it must be offered in the way God had prescribed. The fire must come from the altar of burnt offering--but these priests took common fire instead.

One lesson is, that we are not to be guided by what we think proper and fitting in serving God--but by what God Himself tells us He wants. Saul, in one of his campaigns, thought he would honor God by sparing some of the finest cattle he had taken from the Amalekites, which God had bidden him to destroy and offer them as a burnt offering. But his act was displeasing to God. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Samuel told the king. The Lord knew what was the best thing to do with the Amalekites cattle. Precise obedience is what pleases God. He cares nothing for sacrifices, if in making them we have disobeyed Him. Any fire would make incense burn fragrantly--but God had not said any fire would do. It must be holy fire.

Our worship must be of the heart, inspired by love for Christ and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. All our life must be according to the will of God. It is not enough that we make it brilliant, that it shall win the praise of men--it must please God. It is well for us to ask ourselves continually, what God thinks of us and of the things we do. No matter how men compliment us on the excellence of our achievements, if God is not pleased and does not approve us, human commendation is only a mockery!

Another teaching is, that we are always in danger of offering strange fire in our worship. If our prayers are only for things we ourselves want, without reference to God's will, they are kindled with strange fire. If we offer only forms of worship, however ornate and beautiful--but without faith and love and true adoration, we are offering strange fire to God. If we live in sin, breaking the commandments, and then come before God with devout postures and pious words, it is strange fire we are bringing. If we make money dishonestly and then come with the fruits of our dishonesty in our hands, giving them for God's service, we are offering strange fire in our censer. Only the prayers that are in accordance with the will of God and are inspired by the Spirit of God--are acceptable to the Hearer of prayer. Only the service that is rendered in obedience and holiness is pleasing service. Only the money that is earned according to God's law is a fragrant offering when laid upon God's altar.

Someone tells of an old codfish dealer, a very earnest and sincere man, who prayed every day. One of the chief joys of his life was the hour of daily family worship. One year two merchants persuaded him to go into a deal with them, by which they could control all the codfish in the market and greatly increase the price. The plan was succeeding well when this good old man learned that many poor people in the city were suffering because of the great increase in the price of codfish. It troubled him so, that he broke down in trying to pray at the family altar and went straight to the men who had led him into the plot, and told them that he could not go on with it. Said the old man: "I can't afford to do anything which interferes with my family prayers. And this morning when I got down on my knees and tried to pray, there was a mountain of codfish before me, high enough to shut out the throne of God, and I could not pray. I tried my best to get around it, or get over it--but every time I started to pray, that pile of codfish loomed up between me and my God. I wouldn't have my family prayers spoiled for all the codfish in the Atlantic Ocean, and I shall have nothing more to do with it, or with any money made out of it."

When Nadab and Abihu had offered the strange fire, the punishment followed swiftly and terribly. "So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them!" On one page of the Scriptures we read: "God is love," but on another page we find the words: "Our God is a consuming fire." We see so much of the Divine mercy that covers up our sins and hides them, putting out their blackness with the glorious whiteness of grace, that we are in danger of forgetting how exceedingly sinful sin is, how hateful to God, and what penalties it brings upon itself! Indeed, the smallest sin is a breach of law which would invariably

draw instant death upon him who commits it--were it not for the patience and forbearance of God. Such judgments as this, give us glimpses of sin's true character and its invariable penalties, unless we are shielded beneath the wings of Divine love!

God's holiness is always manifested in His acts, whether they are of mercy or of justice. In the case of these men, the holiness was shown in their punishment. They refused to honor the Lord by doing that which he had commanded them to do, and were struck down at the tabernacle door for their sin. The law of God always has a double aspect. From one side--it appears bright and full of blessing; from the other side--it is dark and full of terrors. It is like the pillar of cloud which led the people in their journey from Egypt. It was light on one side, towards the Israelites; it was dark and terrible towards the Egyptians. Even of the gospel of Christ, the same is true. Paul tells us that it is either the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. If we accept it, it has only good for us; but if we reject it, it has only condemnation.

The conduct of Aaron in the presence of his great sorrow is pathetic. "Aaron remained silent." His heart was crushed by the terrible sorrow--but he recognized the justice of God and bowed himself submissively to the Divine will. We may always be silent to God, therefore, even in the darkest hours and in the most painful experiences. We do not need to understand--God understands, and He is our Father. On the grave of a child in an English churchyard, these words are cut in the marble: "Who plucked this flower?" The answer from, Christ will be: "It was I." Then sorrowing ones should be silent in their grief.

God has a sovereign right to do as He will, and we may not question what He does. We know that God is love and that all He does is done in love. We know that He is wise and good and that His way is always right and best for us. We should never be afraid to trust His heart--when we cannot understand His hand.

Aaron's sorrow was made far more intense by the fact that his sons had died in an act of disobedience to God. It makes a vast difference, when parents sit beside the coffin of their dead child, whether the child has died in sweet faith in Christ--or in sin. If Aaron's sons had fallen in the performance of some duty, giving their lives a sacrifice in obedience to God, there would have been no bitterness in the father's heart. But when death had come because of their sin--there seemed no comfort. What could the father say? David's grief over Absalom was similar. All the stricken king could say was: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would that I had died instead of you!" Aaron said nothing, bearing his sorrow in silence.

It seemed a strange command that Moses gave, forbidding any exhibition of grief over the death of these young men. "Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community." One reason for this was that any expression of grief in this case would seem to be a complaint against what God had done, and they were not, either by word, by act, or by look, to show anything but the most perfect submission. These men had sinned, and had been stricken down because of their sin. There must be reverence and submission before God, and not complaint.

Another reason why they should not give expression to their grief was that they had their duties to perform in the tabernacle and must not leave them for a moment, not even to attend to what seemed to be the sacred duties of affection. The worship of God must not be interrupted, even by the experience of sorrow.

We must not understand, however, from the command in this particular case, that we are never to weep over our friends who have died. Grief is human. Jesus Himself wept beside the grave of His friend Lazarus, at Bethany, and He does not forbid tears in time of affliction. But we should never weep rebelliously, and our grief must never interfere with our duty. Ofttimes there are things to be done even in

the midst of our sorrow, and duty must not stop even for tears. Jesus refused a disciple permission to go home to bury his father, before going forth with the gospel message. We must go on with our work in the very days of bereavement.

Sometimes people let their tasks drop out of their hands in the time of trouble, as if they are absolved from any further participation in the duties of active life. But this is wrong. We lay our dead away today, and tomorrow we must return to our place in the midst of life's activities. Our friend's work in this world was done when God called him away--but our work is not finished, and we must not neglect it, even though our hearts are breaking with grief.

One of the saddest things about this whole story, is that the crime seems to have been the result of intemperance. The fact that the command was given at that particular time and in connection with this terrible occurrence, that priests should drink no wine when they were about to enter the tabernacle to engage in their sacred duties, seems to imply that the sin of these men was due partly at least to intoxication. The lesson is very urgent. It applies first to ministers, to those who minister at God's altar, to those who have to do with spiritual things. They should not take strong drink when they are about to engage in God's service. The reason suggested is that their minds may always be clear to understand what is right and what is not right, and that they may be able to teach the people wisely and discreetly all the words of God. Those who yield to the influence of strong drink are thereby disqualified for the sacred work of their office.

But we need not confine this Divine counsel to ministers. The lesson is for all. We should always live so as to be at our best, with mind unclouded, that we may know distinctly what our duty is. Strong drink unfits anyone for truest and best living. It takes away men's senses. It makes them reckless. They are unable while under its influence to do their work well.

At a large banquet given in a great city by physicians, in honor of a distinguished surgeon from abroad, the visitor turned down his glasses when the wine was brought on. One sitting beside him asked somewhat playfully: "Why, doctor, are you an abstainer?" The honored guest replied: "Not perhaps for the reason usually given--but I am a surgeon, and any moment may be called to perform some delicate operation on which life and death depend. I must never be unready. I must always be in condition to do the most perfect work possible as a surgeon. Even the smallest indulgence in alcohol unfits me, at least in some degree, for doing my best work. Hence I never drink at all."

The great doctor's experience is suggestive. Every man should be always at his best, ready to do his duty in the fullest, completest way. Anything which unfits him for this, he should never do. A young surgeon was proving most skillful and successful in his profession. His specialty was the eye. He was becoming very proficient. He was passionately fond of cricket. But he discovered that playing was affecting his hands. He saw that if he would do his best in his work on the eye--he must give up his cricket. It was hard to do this--but he did it cheerfully in order that his hand might always do its best in his profession.

Whatever in life, though it be only harmless play, that hinders us in reaching the highest attainments or doing the truest and worthiest things--we should gladly sacrifice. This is one of the reasons for abstinence from strong drink. Some men tell us that it excites and stimulates them so that they can think more brilliantly and work more rapidly and efficiently. But the effect in such cases is illusive, is only temporary at the best, with unwholesome reaction. The excitement produced by wine is not normal, is unnatural, and, as in the case of the great surgeon, really unfits one for work that requires steadiness and nerve and the

fullest possession and use of all one's faculties. Paul's counsel is always the sanest: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

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