

STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" Mark 1:18.

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"OUR SOUL IS DRIED AWAY"

Dr. H. T. Spence

As these days of the end time catapult us closer to the secret coming of Christ for His own, there is a greater move by Satan and the world to "wear out" the saints (Daniel 7:25). This wearing out is coming in a variety of ways, and the Christian must be prepared to confront such physical, mental, and emotional afflictions. Galatians 6:9 states, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Paul warns here of the potential danger of becoming relaxed, exhausted, or loose in living as a result of yielding to evil. In II Thessalonians 3:13 he states, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." This weariness is potentially found when one has to take a stand for the right thing over and over again. In having to deal with the same

problem repeatedly, one may simply quit, faint, or give up the stand. Even Christ warned in the Olivet Discourse: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:13). These are days that truly try men's souls; these are days when it is very easy to give in to the pressures of the times, the compromises that are ever vying for one's attention. These are days when Christians could easily forfeit communion with God and become entangled with the cares of this life.

The Book of Numbers

The book of Numbers is one of the crucial books in Scripture that gives insight to this "wearing out." The events of Numbers begin exactly one month after the erection of the Tabernacle,

when the Lord commanded Moses to number the people (Numbers 1:1-3). From the first numbering of Israel to the second numbering (26:2), approximately thirty-eight years elapsed; the majority of these years take place between Numbers 19 and 20. The Book itself covers the time span from the second month of the second year after the Exodus from Egypt to the tenth month of the fortieth year. However, the years of unbelief and wandering are mostly passed over in silence.

The name of this book comes from the Latin *Numeri*; the English word is simply the transliteration of that word. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) uses the Greek word for *arithmoi*, from which English derives the word *arithmetic*. The book is given this title because the people of Israel are numbered twice in it. The Jews have given to this book the name *Be-Midbbar*, which means "in the wilderness." This meaning delineates the second major

purpose of the book.

The word *wilderness* is mentioned in Numbers forty-five times, more than in any other book of Scripture. Wilderness is a term mentioned in several contexts in the journeys of God's people. It is described as desert, though not what one would normally picture as simply miles and miles of sand dunes. It is the term *Midbbar* meaning "to drive"; it is a place for driving or pasturing sheep. The Scriptures describe it as a place of dryness, a place of emptiness, a place of wild animals, a place of ruin, a place that lies in waste with only a few places of water, a place of caves, and a place of aloneness.

In the Christian's life, the wilderness is presented in four contexts in the Scriptures. First, it is clearly a type of the world, spiritually and morally. It is a place of dryness where the Word of God is rarely heard and where governments and people live wasted lives. Truly, the world is a place void of the fruitfulness of God.

Second, the wilderness is a type of the carnal life, which is known after the New Birth, where the Christian comes to face his polluted nature in the light of Christ. It is the spiritual geography of Romans 7, the Christian's fighting the nature within against God, a nature marked by complaint and rebellion.

Third, God also presents the wilderness in Scripture in the context of a testing ground of man. The multitude of circumstances throughout life brings to surface the humanities of man, test his faith in God,

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and add to his character the image of Christ.

In the fourth context, the wilderness is as a place where the child of God humanly desires to go when trials seem to be unending. David cried in Psalm 55:6,7, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah."

It must be remembered that Israel's wilderness wanderings were because of their *unbelief* in entering the land of Promise. Though they tried to go up anyway, the Lord would not allow them because their hearts were not ready. It took forty years to exterminate the unbelief and properly prepare the second generation to enter the Canaan land. Yes, the wilderness was to exterminate all those things within that would hinder their conquering and inhabiting of Canaan.

Death in the Wilderness

Exodus 32 presents the first wilderness deaths among the children of Israel. Moses had just come down from Mount Sinai after being with God for about six weeks. Moses returned to find the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf Aaron had made during Moses' absence. Three thousand were put to death because of this sin of idolatry. According to Acts 7:39-40, it was here that their hearts went back to Egypt. They had secretly longed to return to that House of Bondage; their hearts went back, revealing where their treasure truly

was (Matthew 6:21).

Leviticus 10 soberly tells the story of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. The priesthood had just been established; the seven days of the consecration of Aaron and his sons had been completed. On the first day of worship in the Tabernacle, Nadab and Abihu took to the Altar of Incense a fire other than that of the Brazen Altar. Because of this disobedience, God consumed them with fire that came out of the Holy of Holies.

Numbers 11 presents another peculiar judgment of God. Although the children of Israel had regularly murmured and complained before, this incident became the first time that God judged their complaints with death. Having left Mount Sinai three days prior, complaining and murmuring erupted in the back of the camp during the journey. Although a proper procedure for journeying had been established (in the early part of the Book of Numbers), there were those who became stragglers because of infirmity, tiredness, or bitterness of spirit in the journey. These individuals had moved the farthest away from the Cloud that was leading Israel in the front, and farthest from the presence of the ark in the middle.

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp (Numbers 11:1).

Uttermost Parts of the Camp

When the heart of a child breaks communion with God and does not grow on with Him, he tends to fall to the back of the camp. Christians will always face the danger of leaving their appointed place of walk in grace and begin to distance themselves from God and God's people. How often do we see individuals in our churches turning away from God, and finally from God's people? This turning does not happen overnight. It begins in the heart, and day by day, that heart withdraws more and more from walking with God. A backsliding heart succumbs to a backslidden heart. Restlessness takes over; guilt sets in, along with loneliness of soul and a fallen countenance. The will becomes rebellious; faith in God and love for God wane. One then begins missing church; murmuring and complaining become the bitter waters that flow from the heart in conversation with others. Carnality rises and one withdraws from that which is desperately needed for his soul's survival.

Hebrews 3:7-19 presents Israel's sevenfold steps of leaving God; this digression is also seen among professing Christians. (1) Departure commences in refusing to hear God, to hear the preaching of God's Word, and to hear the exhortations from the Lord concerning one's life (3:7). (2) This continual refusal to hear then leads to hardness of the heart concerning the things of God. Every time a child of God refuses to listen to God, the heart stiffens to cushion the blow of that Word.

Eventually the heart enters a state of hardness (3:8,13,15). (3) The next step is unbelief—the consequence of hardness. Evil takes over the heart that no longer believes in the promises and provisions of the Word of God (3:12). (4) This unbelief is followed by a departing from the living God. This is not God's departing, but the individual's departing from God (3:12). (5) This heart departure soon yields to open rebellion against God (3:8,9,16). (6) The individual then gives way to habitual sinning and careless living (3:10,17). Finally (7), all faith in God and His redemptive work seems to be overthrown (3:17,19). Oh, how far one can go in bitterness, hatred, coldness, and aloneness!

The Face of the Matter

In the Bible, the mentioning of the face or countenance of man indicates his presence. Man's face is considered his noblest feature. Genesis 3:8 states that when they sinned, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the *presence* of the Lord, or the literal Hebrew, from the *face* of the Lord. This is one of the first things an individual does within his heart when he begins to leave God; he wants to get away from His face, His presence. To the contrary, a child of God going on with God wants to know this face even more.

And he [God] said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he [Moses] said, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence (Exodus 33:14,15).

The word for *presence* here is *face*. In II Chronicles 7:14, the Lord responded to Solomon, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and *seek my face*, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." In Isaiah 45:22, God declares, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." "Look unto me" literally indicates "Turn your face unto me." The Psalmist longed for the face of God in 13:1, "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" In 27:8,9 the Psalmist cried, "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me." The twelve loaves of unleavened bread in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle were called "shewbread" or "the bread of the presence," or "the bread of the face." This bread represented the desire of the Lord for the tribes (symbolically in the loaves) to ever reside before Him, or before His face, continually.

To depart, to leave what is represented as the face of God, is a commentary on the heart. When one becomes upset with someone, he immediately avoids the presence of that person. How often this happens in churches, good churches! A breakage of communion with God or with a brother in Christ causes the heart to want to get away from seeing the face of God or that brother.

Leaving God's face destroys any desire for God's Word, strong

preaching, prayer, the communion of His people, the warmth and burning eyes of God's face dealing with us. Our nature then takes over with complaint, murmur, and rebellion.

However, this leaving goes beyond the privacy of the heart. One *will* seek out others who have this same attitude and bitterness, because they too are at the back of the camp. There will arise a mutual hostility against God, against His providence, against the way the true camp is being led. Compromise will begin setting in. The compromising heart then will convince itself that principles are no longer needed; interpretation of the Bible becomes a matter of semantics. The back-slidden heart will long to be satisfied with a more liberal way and a more liberal walk. It is evident in this day that those at the back of the camp, in the outskirts of the camp, the spiritual stragglers in the church are growing in number. Very few seem to want to go on and live the ways of God.

Now, we are not stating that the ones mentioned in Numbers 11 were the only ones who complained. There may easily have been those at the front of the camp who had a secret, complaining heart; however, their heart's dissatisfaction may not have been as deep at this time. It may be that God sent this powerful judgment to the back of the camp as a merciful warning to the others. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (I Timothy 5:20).

The people then cried unto Moses; and Moses prayed unto the Lord. By his intercession the fire was quenched. The place of this judgment became known as *Taberah*, the place of the burning. Yes, there is a time when God will no longer permit murmuring and complaining in a secret backslidden heart. He will finally send judgment to purge all hindrances and consume the waste and clutter of that soul. God often does this on this side of eternity in an individual or in a church. However, the ultimate burning will be at the *Bematos*, where all Christians will be judged for their motives, words, and deeds (I Corinthians 3:13-15; II Corinthians 5:10).

The Mixed Multitude

A mixed multitude (or in the Hebrew, a “mingled people” or “rabble”) came out of Egypt for various reasons. Such a multitude has a profound effect on the people of God and on a church. They are the ones who do not have the heart of God; they are the ones who complain about the standards, the principles, and the living of the Christian life. “Why can’t we do this or that?”

In Numbers 11:4, this mixed multitude fell a lusting for the flesh, the carnal, and the worldly. They cried, “We did eat in Egypt freely.” When discouragement and complaint come into the heart, the memory of the food of the old life reappears. Yet one tends to forget the bondage he experienced back in Egypt. This is the heart of the carnal; this is the

heart of “the flesh.” It must be understood that God allows trials in the wilderness to come upon us; yea, He sends them. They are to bring out of us what truly is in us!

Our Soul Is Dried Away

The final cry of such people is “Now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (11:6). When one leaves his walk with God and begins turning aside to his own backsliding, his ultimate complaint will be against the Word of God. He becomes tired of it; he believes the preacher is preaching at him; he no longer has an ear to hear and a heart to receive. He believes his “soul is dried away.” Such an individual complains that such preaching is going to make him “wither away” or “pine away.” This will be true when the heart is given to discontent and inordinate appetites; this will be true when the heart leaves God. The hunger will no longer be for the strong preaching, but for more pleasures and less accountability. But Egypt’s food cannot nourish the new nature; only God’s heaven-sent nourishment can!

The mixed principles of the mixed multitude bring a burning and loathing of the principles of God’s Word. Communion for them is lost, and the old ways return. The same happens in any church, any educational institution, or any true Bible movement. Once secret communion of the heart is broken with God and is not restored, the heart follows the path that leads away from God, away from His face,

away from His strongly preached Word, and away from the true children of God. Eventually, open talk is sounded against the Bible and its principles, with the declaration, "I am sick and tired of it!" Yes, the soul has become dried away. Dear reader, do not let broken communion go long. Each time it happens, it takes us further away from God.

May the Lord keep our hearts as we journey through this wilderness of life. May we not be found among the murmuring and complaining ones. Such is the warning of John's Gospel (6:60,61,66,67):

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can bear it? When Jesus knew in

himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? . . . From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

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Neutral, Broad, or Balance?

O. Talmadge Spence

There is the story of a fish family in which the mother advised her three babies concerning the three alternatives of life. First, she said, "Do not swim in the deep." Second, "Do not swim in the shallow water." Third, "Swim just right." But two of her babies reasoned, "Water is water and every fish must swim, so why bother about the particulars?"

There are three alternatives in our lives. Shall we live in the neutral, the broad, or the balance? To be neutral in the issues of life will not do. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). On the other hand, to be broad, all-inclusive, of everything and everybody, without discrimination, will not do either. For Jesus also said, "No man can serve two masters: for he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24a). There are waters to live and survive in—waters safe, in a balanced way—and we urgently need, in this twentieth century, to be particular about this matter of balance.

This balance is sought by the Bible believers not in the realm of personality, for who would be the criterion of such a measurement among men? This balance is not found in intellect or wealth or heredity or environment or personal circumstance. A balanced Christian life is only found when man is in his proper place at the Cross of Calvary—living an uncompromising (not neutral) life, and a separated (not broad) life, with definite boundaries. The balance, in reality, is not within man himself but rather in that place of balance at the Cross.

To avoid the shallow waters of neutrality, the Christian takes a stand right in the middle of the biblical fundamentals, the biblical essentials of the eternal Word of God. We are not talking about the usual "middle-of-the-roader"; he is too broad. To avoid the deep waters of universal appeal and undefined loves, the Christian must abide in the disciplines and dedications of a truly separated life. We dare not lose our balance, on the one hand, by omitting the true balm of biblical compassion for all men, nor, on the other hand, lose our balance by omitting the urgencies of our becoming involved in a contemporary, universal world to all men. However, we must maintain our balance and integrity by witnessing and practicing the unschizophrenic oneness of being genuine, through and through. You will recall, Ephraim was "a cake not turned" (Hosea 7:8b); but, the Shulamite possessed all her teeth, the upper balanced with the lower, clean and white (Song of Sol. 4:2, 6:6); and, the Four Living Creatures were "full of eyes before and behind" (Rev. 4:6). What a balance!

Someone might say, "to be in Christendom is to be a Christian, why bother with the particulars and be technical?" The answer to that is this. It takes biblical particulars to be biblically balanced.

Straightway, January 1974

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The
FUNDAMENTALIST
and the
HOLINESS OF GOD

BY O. TALMADGE SPENCE

“One of the warnings which must be sounded concerns the extremes to which some theological systems have taken the teaching of sanctification. Each World Congress of Fundamentalists has included resolutions against the errors of hyper-Calvinism, hyper-Arminianism, and other hyper-systems. These resolutions are a safekeeping for many doctrines, providing a balance against such extremes. These extremes include *antinomianism* at one end of the pendulum and *legalism* at the other end. We must guard against such extremes which produce errors stating that God is the author of sin, condoning sin in our lives, as well as claims toward human, sinless perfection. Somewhere in all of this cautiousness lies the distinctive principle that should be the basis of the interpretation of sanctification in the life of a Christian governed by the grace of God. Sin is always possible; but sin is never a necessity. All of our individual distinctives must fall within these boundaries, or else we shall defeat the hope of a holy life at all in Christ Jesus.” [30 pages]

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