

Death in the Wilderness

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:01] The Susan Numbers Chapter 21 Verse 4 And they journeyed from Mount Hoar By the way of the Red Sea To compass the land of Edom And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way And the people spake against God and against Moses Therefore has he brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness For there is no bread, neither is there any water For we must all live this life [00:01:02] And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people And they bit the people and much people of Israel died Therefore the people came to Moses and said we have sinned For we have spoken against the Lord and against thee Pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us And Moses prayed for the people And the Lord said unto Moses make thee a fiery serpent And set it upon a pole And it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten when he looketh upon it shall live And Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole And it came to pass that if any man If a serpent had bitten any man when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived [00:02:03] And the children of Israel said forward the next verse Toward the sun Very briefly I would like to dwell tonight upon the seriousness of death in the wilderness The Lord is not here, he has risen There is a blessed living man in the glory of God tonight Further the spirit of God is here A divine person who links our hearts livingly with himself A blessed living spirit [00:03:01] But it is in the light of this that death in the wilderness becomes a serious matter When we see the implications of the teaching Death in this context is part of a bigger subject The issues of life and death belong to God Remember how the king of Israel could say am I God? To kill and to make alive But if I read scripture correctly The wilderness represents our responsible pathway And there is ever the possibility in that responsibility Of losing the slender threads of our communion with God We never could thank him enough That the links which have been forged at Calvary can never be broken Nevertheless there is the possibility in our responsible life [00:04:03] Of losing communion with God Now if I am correct in my researches I haven't got this from the book I think there are seven occasions When the Lord by plague or by violent means Had to bring death upon the people of God in the wilderness Six of these are recorded in numbers One of them in exodus There may be other occasions As for example when Miriam was smitten with leprosy A sort of living death There may be other instances that the brethren can think of But for the moment I am going to ask you to focus on the seven occasions I am moreover going to take the order of them [00:05:01] Not the order that appears in numbers But the order that appears in 1 Corinthians 10 Where I believe we have the spiritual order May I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance You remember in that chapter How that the people of God fed upon the manna They drank of that rock which followed them Which rock was Christ But then the scripture says with many of them God was not well pleased And then we have listed five instances of their defection We read that they lusted We read that they became idolaters We read that they committed fornication We read that they tempted Christ And the last one we read that they murmured

[00:06:02] And if we were to look up the context of these We would find a very interesting Old Testament story To follow this brief New Testament synopsis It would seem that the two instances that are omitted in 1 Corinthians 10 Are dealt with elsewhere in the New Testament No mention is made in 1 Corinthians 10 of the sin of unbelief You remember how that on the occasion of the spies being sent into the land How that the people refused to go into the land And the divine judgment was that your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness Could it be that this particular instance is omitted from 1 Corinthians 10 [00:07:02] For the very simple reason that it receives a full treatment in Hebrews 3 and 4 Secondly in 1 Corinthians 10 there is no mention made Of the sin of apostasy, Korah, Nathan, Satan and Abiram For the simple reason one suggests That this defection receives full treatment in the epistle by Jude and in 2 Peter Now why is this so important?

When we read further in Numbers We find in the 17th chapter a very clear reference to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Remember concerning that which spoke of the tribe of Levi That the staff budded and it brought forth buds and bloomed blossoms and brought forth almonds [00:08:08] A clear picture in the Old Testament of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ In that chapter we read I will cause to cease the murmurings of the people of Israel before me And then a little later in Numbers in the 20th and 21st chapters We find what clearly is a reference to the Spirit Gather my people together and I will give them water Do you remember how the princes of the congregation with their spades dug the well And it was on that remarkable occasion that we get the word spring up a well Sing ye unto it Even in the chapter that we have looked at in the 21st chapter [00:09:02] We find clearer references to an abundance of water Water, water brooks, rivers, springs That which is typical of the land and it's a land that has an abundance of water Clear references to the Spirit It's when we are livingly brought into this sphere Where Christ is supreme, where the Father's world is open to us Where we are conscious of the place that grace has put us in That anything that is a challenge to the preeminence of Christ Is viewed in a very serious way And it's in the context of the preeminence of Christ That we have to look a little more closely at these affections that bring the divine judgment Could we do that quickly, very briefly [00:10:03] We read in 1 Corinthians 10 That the people lusted Hebrews, Hathaba, the graves of lust Now when we look at the 11th chapter of Numbers Sad to say the occasion is when the people were growing weary of the man You remember how that they began to grind it with mills They put it into the mortar, they made cakes of it And the taste of it was like the taste of fresh oil Hearts that are getting weary of Christ begin to turn elsewhere And in that chapter you find that they began to long for meat And God gave them poison You remember, and it's always a solemn consideration That God does tend to give us what our hearts are set upon [00:11:04] But on the very occasion when the flesh was between their teeth Before even it was chewed We read that God smote them with a very great plague The next step after the lusting is idolatry And when we turn back to Exodus We find on the occasion of the golden calf That when the sight had been lost of Moses As for this Moses we know not what is become of him The people made a calf Unless we should think it was overt idolatry You remember how that Aaron said it is a feast under Jehovah It is possible even to have the form of outward religion [00:12:01] When the heart is far away And on that occasion 6,000 people died The next step after the lusting and the idolatry Is fornication You remember how that after Balaam's prophecy In the twenty-fifth chapter We find that the people began to commit fornication With the daughters of Midian Fornication And on this occasion 23 or 24,000 people died As for the other two instances I am going to jump those over In connection with apostasy and unbelief The fifth of the cases in 1 Corinthians 10 is they murmured And murmuring has to be understood in the context where it occurs [00:13:02] It is not just groaning with circumstances It is groaning with the divine order What comes out last in the moral section 1 Corinthians 10 Comes out first in the historical section of Numbers You remember how that there is a little division in Numbers at that point God has been speaking of the count The numbering of the tribes They have been set in

relation to the ark Instructions have been given for carrying the ark to the wilderness A divine profession that is in the dignity of heaven And you find that there are some who would murmur against it Who kick against the divine order And this is a very serious symptom Because it indicates underneath that the heart is not brightened with God [00:14:03] This was the occasion when the fire burnt And some in the outermost parts of the camp died in the wilderness I am afraid these things, beloved brethren, are happening amongst us I speak feelingly in the section we have had in our own meeting I am not washing dirty linen in public But these things are happening We had a campaign recently An enthusiastic sister got hold of somebody who wasn't very well established In the meeting, come along to the campaign I am afraid they may have got that dear soul along to the campaign But we haven't seen them anymore at the meeting The fire burns in the outermost parts of the camp But in taking up a subject like this [00:15:04] What one would seek ever so briefly to point out Is that God would have us in living condition before himself The scripture comes to mind That the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked The Lord has no pleasure in the cessation of communion of any of his own With the blessed man at his right hand And the enjoyment of all the Father's work And that was really what led me to the 21st chapter of Numbers Here is a very interesting section Clearly an important one Because where we stopped reading at verse 10 For the first time you find that the children of Israel set forward [00:16:03] They had been wandering here before But now they set forward And in verse 11 it's towards the sun rising They're marching towards the sun rising It had been a time of victory at the beginning of the chapter They overcame the Canaanites The traitor, the merchant element had been defeated But where we started reading in verse 4 The heart of the people was much discouraged because of the way We noticed in the 17th chapter didn't we In connection with that which is a figure of Christ Aaron's rod that was buttered At the end of that chapter you come to those words Behold who's died, we perish, we all perish And I'm afraid that all of us have to learn from time to time That in our own hearts we tend to wander away [00:17:03] Prone to wander, Lord we feel it Prone to leave the God we love The very Him that we started with And thus thy deep protection, much better should I know But I'm afraid that inside we're conscious of that flesh Which is enmity against God Now what we learn in this section Some folks take it up as being very simple I think it's a very profound passage We find the truth of the praise of God It's a wonderful thing for us to realize That every defection that we see outside or inside This evil heart of unbelief This flesh that is enmity against God We can trace it up to the source We can trace it up to the devil himself And the interesting thing that we learn in this passage [00:18:06] That the brazen serpent has been set upon a pole We know from the New Testament scripture That this is a plain reference to the Lord Jesus As he died upon the cross Do we not really know That has made him to be sin for us Do you know sin? That we should be made the consciousness of God in him And in another passage What the law could not do In that it would weep through the flesh God sinned in his own son And for sin, condemned sin in the flesh At the cross God has not only dealt with sin He has dealt with sin He has dealt with the root principle of it And he has put it away forever And in this passage we find that whoever looked [00:19:03] Upon that serpent on the pole Lived the principle of life Amen I remember once listening to a missionary Back from the Congo We have been out eating for a while He was preaching on this scripture in the gospel He brought forward an illustration That perhaps helped so far as his gospel preaching was concerned But he underestimated the case This was the story In the Congo one of the natives had been bitten by a snake Fairly common occurrence And they brought the patient in Moribund Into the surgery And because he had the anti-venom vaccine He was able to put a needle in the vein And the patient recuperated He came back to life [00:20:02] But that hardly was teaching here It's not a question of coming back to the old life No Thanks be to God you live in a new life You are raised to the realm where Christ is in resurrection And the spirit gives us a living link with a blessed man out of death In order that we might live in the sphere where he lives And the life that is suggested here in time Is that eternal life Which is opened out for us in New Testament

scripture Well I was better and this was what was in my mind May I say That if anybody has any sensitivity to the present position Generally I think we have to earn an often times deadness of conscience A name that we live and we are dead [00:21:03] We have to say in our own hearts We are conscious of the unresponsiveness of those hearts to Christ And I just wonder whether perhaps this little word of death in the wilderness Not an outward and visible affair A matter that touches us in our affections Isn't a very practical matter for us in this day in which we live May we be preserved from deadness And live in a precious life Which God has made available to us In the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus