

Elements to Assure

Neh. 9:19 *"Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness:..."*

In many ways, God expressed His goodness to Israel to comfort, encourage, strengthen, and stimulate them to go on faithfully for Him in the wilderness journey. All of His expressions of goodness have their application to us and should serve the same purpose. He provided daily manna to assure them of His faithful provision to sustain them, the fire by night and cloudy pillar by day to assure them of His presence to guard and guide them. They also could see the continual smoke of the burnt offering to remind them of His provision for their acceptance before Him and in a smaller way, they could see the ashes on the east side of the altar if they stood at the door, to assure them of the completeness of the sacrifice to provide for their standing before the Lord. There seems to be little more that the Lord could have done to incentivize them to go on in faithfulness to Him without murmuring or rebelling. Yet, murmur and rebel they did, despite all that God had provided. It should be very precious to our souls to remember that despite their wrong attitudes and failures, those provisions never ceased or failed. How good is God to His failing people!

The manna, answering their hunger, should have assured them of God's care and faithfulness to them under all conditions. They lusted for the food of Egypt (1 Cor. 10:6, Ex. 16:2-3), forgetting the suffering they had endured and the intensity of their labors. That may be true of us too! We can forget the conditions when we had no peace and served sin but still desire the entertainments and amusements of the world. The manna pictures the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus, His eternity (round), purity (white), small (humility), and linked with the dew (the Holy Spirit). He was in this wilderness, as we are, but He displayed perfect submission to the will of the Father and manifested perfect humanity despite adversity and evil. Feeding on Him daily will always help us go on in daily dependence on our

God to supply and strengthen. Manna can also suggest the purity and sufficiency of God's Word, and only by feeding our souls on it daily will we be kept in this wicked and dangerous scene and helped to go on faithfully for our Lord.

If, during the night, they feared attacks by their foes or if, during the day, there were terrifying elements around, they only had to look toward the Tabernacle to see the pillar of fire at night and the cloudy panoply during the day to be assured that God hadn't left them (Neh. 9:19). Seeing that symbol of His presence that guarded and guided during the night or overshadowed them during the day should have given them complete confidence and erased every fear. Yet they feared. He promised them through Moses that His presence would go with them, even after they had sinned at Sinai (Ex. 33:14), yet they refused to go forward to possess the land at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 14). Isn't that an illustration of our fearfulness at times? It may be difficult to retain confidence and assurance in this world with its troubles, uncertainties, or strifes, He is the same at all times. Doesn't that speak to us of our refusals to obey His voice, to possess and enjoy all that He has promised to give us in Christ, despite every promise that He provides? The assurance of His Word is that "*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*" (Heb. 13:5-6) and we should rest in His promise and move with confidence each day, personally realizing His presence with us in all circumstances.

Another source of assurance was the smoke from the burnt offering. The Lord commanded that the morning and evening sacrifice should never cease and that the fire should never go out (Lev. 6:12-13). Even when the people failed to bring their sacrifices and offerings to the Lord, these two constant reminders of the ground of their acceptance before God never failed. The burnt offering speaks of the unreserved devotion of the Lord to give Himself entirely for the glory of God and to provide for our acceptance (Lev. 1:3 JND trans) in His presence at all times without regard for our actual condition. We find our standing and assurance of being accepted before God entirely on the ground of Christ and His work on our behalf at the cross. It isn't His life that

gives us that position but His death and its everlasting value to God. We are

"*accepted* (taken into favor) *in the beloved*" (Eph. 1:6). That has never changed and never will. All all times and phases of our lives, we should be looking away from self and failure and only looking to Him, who did all things to please the Father and who has given His life an eternal atonement for us.

A smaller item that seems to give assurance was the ashes on the east side of the altar. God instructed the priests how they were to handle those remnants of the sacrifices that had been burned on the altar. They were to be placed on the east side (Lev. 1:16) before being removed outside the camp to a clean place (Lev. 6:11). The east side would suggest the side of resurrection, thus reminding us that the sacrifice of our blessed Savior wasn't the end, for He rose again in triumph and glory. A living Savior should always give strength and encouragement to our souls in this world of deadness and decay. But the east side is also the side toward the entrance, and a worshipping Israelite who came to the gate in the morning could see the ashes by the altar. Those ashes gave evidence that the fire had done its work, the sacrifice was complete, and there was nothing more to be accomplished. So far as that sacrifice was concerned, the fire could go out (it never did in the OT). And for us, we behold a completed sacrifice that is so satisfying that nothing remains to be done, and the fire of God's judgment has nothing more to do, so it has gone out so far as we are concerned. "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus....*" (Rom. 8:11). What a blessed assurance this gives as we travel homeward through this waste and weary wilderness of this world. May the significance of these elements encourage us as well. He is with us to the end!

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