

II. Faith Yielding to Discouragement, 4-6.

V. 4. *And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea.* This passage connects with chapter 20: 21. Because the Edomites would not allow them to pass through their land, they turned towards the Red Sea, that is, in a southerly direction, in order to go round about the land of Edom which they could not go through. Hor is the mountain on which Aaron died, 20: 28. *The soul of the people was much discouraged*; the people were vexed and impatient, or as the Hebrew says, "their soul was short," because of the way. The obstacles put in their way both by nature and by man, were proving too much for them. Though so near the land of promise, they are compelled to turn their backs upon it.

V. 5. *The people spake against God, and against Moses.* Their words are blasphemy as well as rebellion; for they are spoken not only against Moses, but against God. The actual words recorded, apply more particularly to Moses; but he is the God-appointed leader. To quarrel with him is to find fault with God. *No bread, neither . . . water.* The thirsty wilderness, which could offer them no bread except the manna with which they were disgusted, put an intolerable strain upon their faith and hope. They had not the grace to endure to the end. Their impatience is not unnatural, but it is wrong, and it must be punished. *The Lord sent fiery serpents.* Notice that God often punishes men by purely natural means. As once He brought the quails to feed them, so

now He brings the serpents to chastise them. The serpents are called "fiery serpents," probably not because of their color, though it is said that in that district there is a very poisonous kind of serpent with spots of fiery red, but rather because their poisonous bite causes a violent, burning sensation, and creates excessive thirst and swelling. *Much people . . . died.* The sin had been grievous. The chastisement was heavy.

III. Faith Bringing Life, 7-9.

V. 7. *We have sinned.* The people recognize God's hand in their chastisement. Their affliction leads them to confession. And they feel that their sin can only be taken away by intercession. *Pray unto the Lord.* They cry to Moses. They cannot trust their own prayer. The good, steadfast Moses must pray for them: and his prayer may prevail. For the Lord who sent the serpents can remove them. (For other examples of intercessory prayer see Gen. 20: 7-17; Job 42: 10.)

Vs. 8, 9. Moses prayed, and his prayer was answered. Note, however, that the serpents were not removed; but a means is devised for counteracting the effects of the poisonous bite. The cure is a very simple one, but it is not quite unconditional. It was dependent on the faith of the bitten one. He lived, if he looked, but not unless he looked: and the upward look was the symbol of an inward faith. It was more than a glance at the serpent set upon the standard. It was a glance that betrayed confidence in the word of God through Moses his servant, yea, confidence in God who spake the word.

APPLICATION

Fought against Israel, v. 1. God allows the enemy to wage war upon His people, because He knows that it is only by means of effort that we attain.

Israel vowed a vow, v. 2. Our resolves are often made in some time of difficulty, when the forces of the world press against us. Then we feel the necessity of divine assistance. Our night of tribulation is also the night for the most earnest prayer. As Jacob in his struggle, so these Israelites turned to God for assistance.

And the Lord hearkened, v. 3. Because the

Lord does not give an immediate reply to our request, or because he does not answer in the way we expect, that is no reason for presuming that His promise has been broken. Let us not have preconceived notions as to the working of God in our lives. Let us not be like Naaman, who thought that the divine healing should come according to his own method, 2 Kings 5. God is His own interpreter and He will make all plain in His own good time. Faith never doubts God's readiness to hear.

The soul of the people was discouraged, v. 4.