

Israel's journey lay through a *wilderness*:—the region of sterility where was neither corn nor wine; nothing to sustain their life:—and the region of perplexity where were neither roads nor paths; nothing to direct their course.

Such too is that probationary state, through which the converted have to travel. It is a state of barrenness. It yields nothing to nurture and support spiritual being: nothing to satisfy the wants and wishes of a heart hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The fullest abundance of its native production leaves the immortal spirit craving, starving. Nor is it less a state of intricacy. If left to ourselves, we should go astray at every step. Now we should be confounded by obscurities in doctrine; then by uncertainties in practice; and never could we reach our destination. "Our journey is a thorny maze."

The desert was also to the Jews a scene of *dangers*. There the beasts of the forest prowled around them, and not far distant were the Edomites and Moabites and Ammonites, watching their opportunity to harass them. Hence they were commanded to proceed in military array.

Equally perilous is the course of Christians. Their fellow-men are armed against them. "If they were of the world, the world would love its own; but because they are not of the world, but Christ has chosen them out of the world, therefore the world hateth them;" and seeks to wound them by the shafts of sophistry and scorn and slander, or the sword of persecution. Infernal spirits too oppose them; "their adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." "They wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." They are therefore "soldiers of Jesus Christ," and are commanded to take unto them the panoply of God."

The journey of the Israelites was *circumlocutory*. Jehovah might have led them from Egypt to Canaan by a few days' route; but he caused them to go round, so far and so frequently to trace and retrace their steps, that he kept them wandering no less than forty years.

Thus, likewise, were God so pleased,

he could directly take us to the celestial land of promise on our believing; but he seldom does so. At first, perhaps, he leads us straight onward to the blessed goal, and we conclude we shall quickly be at rest, but soon, he permits temptations to assail us and drive us backward in our course. This method may be repeated often for many years, till we begin to fear that we shall never reach our home.

Once more, the wanderings of the seed of Jacob were marked by *many sins and many chastisements*. They were a stiff-necked and rebellious people, who murmured at every trial which befell them, and frequently forsook Jehovah to serve false Gods. Could a jealous God connive at such transgression? No. Many a time did he afflict them, and often with terrible severity, though he never wholly cut them off.

"Now these things happened unto them for types (see the Greek of 1 Cor. x. 11.) and they are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come." We are daily sinning, and therefore daily suffering. Whence these withdrawals of the light of his countenance? these painful doubts of our interest in his love? these successes of our foes against us? They are corrections for our complainings and idolatries, verifying the warning word: "If his children forsake my law, them will I visit with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless my loving kindness will I not take from them, nor suffer the covenant of my faithfulness to fail."

IV. *Their distinguished privileges.*—*They were in a state of special covenant with God.* He explicitly made and frequently repeated his covenant with their progenitors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and ratified it with the whole nation at Mount Sinai; and instituted circumcision among them as a seal of the mutual engagement. The substance of it was, that He would be to them a God, and they should be to Him a people—i. e. He would divinely bless them as a people, and they should render Him devoted service. All the blessings and enactments of the Jewish Scriptures were but the detail of this covenant.

Blessed be God He has made a new