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I Know that My Redeemer Lives: Christ's Burial

"And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place." – Lev. 6:10-11

The solemn care of the ashes of the burnt offering tells the story of how precious the object was which they represented. The burnt offering was wholly burnt. It was all for God, a sweet savor to the Lord. The garments the priest wore when he took the ashes from the altar and placed them beside it were not the garments he wore when he took them from beside the altar and carried them outside the camp. There is here a suggestion of the end of one priesthood when the ashes were taken from the altar, and the commencement of a new priesthood when they were carried to a clean place outside the camp.

When Nicodemus and Joseph took the body of our Lord from the cross, they broke every tie that bound them to the temple and its service. Were they of the priestly family of Aaron or of the consecrated tribe of Levi, they violated every link with the old order at Jerusalem when they deliberately handled a dead body on the eve of the Passover. They lost every claim to the privileges or service of the temple; they had completely broken with the old order.

But when they carried that body to a clean place outside the camp they were priests of a new order. They were members of that royal priesthood that is a "chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people," ordained to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). They were of that "spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Joseph and Nicodemus carried the ashes of the Burnt Offering to a clean place outside the camp. That Burnt Offering was Christ, who was in every word and deed, in every motive and desire, a sweet savor to the Lord. He came of His own voluntary will; He glorified God on earth and finished the work God gave Him to do.

Joseph and Nicodemus not only as new priests reverently carried and deposited the ashes of the Burnt Offering in that clean tomb, but when they came to the cross to do this honor for Christ, they went forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13). None other of the Lord's disciples had so much to lose as they, and they gladly sacrificed all they had. May devotion to Christ cause us also to go forth unto Him outside this world's approval and honors, bearing His reproach.

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Attitude toward an Assembly

W. J. Driller, Hastings, New Zealand

HOW many of God's beloved saints there are who have had, and are having meted out to them, because of their desire and purpose of heart to walk in His ways according to His Word, treatment by the carnally or worldly-minded that is as far apart from the will and mind of God as the east is from the west. It is to these that we wish to be, by the help and grace of God, a source of comfort and encouragement.

"Truths for our Day"

is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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Thank you

First let us consider what a Church of God or an Assembly of His saints is in a town, district, etc. It is a company of saints, perhaps only 2 or 3, gathered together unto the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20), living stones built together into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), upon Christ as a foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) and with the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). Not gathered on the ground of doctrines however sound they may be, nor on the ground of the one body which takes in every believer, but to a person, our Lord Jesus Christ. In such a gathering we have the Trinity in perfect accord and operation—God the Father by the Holy Spirit gathering obedient saints to the Name of His Son and His Son in the midst of them. Each saint in it is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) ; his body being the temple of the Holy Spirit.

It belongs to God as it is God's Temple (1 Cor. 3:16), and it is builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). This is what the saints at Ephesus were in their local character.

How we should value being associated in Testimony for God upon earth with such a company where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are. How carnally-minded, worldly-minded and spiritually-blinded believers make light of, speak and write against and even deny the existence of such today. The Word of God knows no other gathering however much wisdom and human reasoning may be used to justify its existence. "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17). Come out to whom? To what? To a person surely—our Lord Jesus Christ, to a gathering of saints who in obedience to His Word have gone unto Him without the camp (what professes to be but is not of God) bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13). With such a gathering God associates the "Continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God by Him"—the Lord Jesus (Heb. 13:15). What a company of saints to be in! Surely this is His path for His own who have exercised hearts to do His will. From such a company goes forth His Gospel (1 Thess. 1:8) for He is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20) and is the foundation of it (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also a pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) for He Himself is the Truth (John 14:6). Thus sinners

will be reached by the Gospel and saints preserved and grounded in the ways of the Lord (1 Tim. 4:16) thus having pointed out to them by the Holy Spirit through the Word, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21) .

So an Assembly of God has this dual testimony (1) worldward in the Gospel for their salvation, and (2) saintward in their walk with and for God in this poor world. In the three-fold commission of Matt. 28—preaching the Gospel (Mark 16) or making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28), (believers) baptism and teaching of the saints to observe all things He has commanded, it certainly would not be right for God's people to neglect the observing of the all things and only walk in partial obedience by concentrating all their energies on the preaching of the Gospel. Yet some go to this extreme and extremists only hinder the saints from being well-pleasing to Him. Obedience is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22). This chapter relates the partial obedience of Saul which cost him his rejection by God of being King.

In this fellowship (Matt. 18:20; Heb. 13:13; Acts 2:42) there is the Apostle's doctrine (God's will and mind for His people), the breaking of bread and the prayers. So in this fellowship we have the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11) and in the Word of God it is found nowhere else, and so there is no Scripture for receiving to the Lord's Table but scriptural reception is into assembly fellowship. In Divine things there is no room for earthly, worldly or human wisdom and experiences, human argument or natural reasoning which all belong to the natural man of 1 Cor. 2:14. How necessary then to walk in the light as He is in the light. Disobedience to the Word of God is followed by spiritual darkness, spiritual blindness and how great that darkness becomes.(Matt. 6:23). How often from the platform is the cry heard, "God looks upon our condition and not upon our position" Our God requires us to be right both positionally and conditionally. How could a saint be right conditionally if knowingly wrong positionally, i.e. walking in disobedience to the Word of God?

How discouraging it is to the Lord's people, who desire to do the Lord's will, to see those who should stand firmly against what is

contrary to the Word, remaining in silence and not raising their voices against evil practices. Silence gives consent. In Acts 7 Saul is seen as a young man witnessing the stoning of Stephen. Outwardly he might have seemed innocent as he was only taking care of the raiment of those who stoned Stephen but afterwards he says, "I was also standing by and consenting unto his death" (Acts 22:20). This silent consent developed into "breathing out threatenings" and open rebellion against the people of God (Acts 9:1-2).

Do you, do I, discourage the Lord's people thus? Are you, am I, guilty before God by our silence, of consenting to evil, to departure from God and His Word in the Assembly? Is the state the Assembly has got into due to your, or to my, silence? If so, let us consider whether very soon we too shall be active partakers and active supporters in this departure.

To the church are given two and only two visible ordinances (1 Cor. 11:1). Believers' "Baptism" and "Breaking of Bread." An Assembly of God will, in obedience to His Word, keep both and not one only. The saints of God in it should seek His grace to give due regard to the observance of the all things commanded by the Lord (Matt. 28:20) who declared "if ye love Me keep my commandments" (John 14:15, 21, 23). The pattern Assembly is described in Acts 2:42. After their salvation and baptism, they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. Into this fellowship, not to the breaking of bread, the Apostle Paul was received on the testimony of Barnabas in Acts 9 and he was with them, coming in and going out and no mention is made whatever of the breaking of bread and why? It is the privilege of those in the fellow-ship of the Assembly.

How many have started well but have failed to continue, because in some cases, they have received anything but Christ-like treatment, have absented themselves and eventually landed in men's religious systems. The Apostle Paul's exhortation to Timothy was "Take heed to thyself (self first) and to the doctrine; continue in them for in so doing thou shalt both save thyself (self-preservation) and them that hear thee (i. e. the preservation of others)" 1 Tim. 4:16. Again in Heb. 12—"Make straight paths for thy feet." Then again in Rev.

3:11, "Hold fast that which thou hast (keeping His Word, not denying His Name, and keeping the Word of His patience —His coming again)." Let us not be deceived by the oft-repeated, unscriptural statement that there are no Assemblies of God today because the Church is in ruins. The epistle to Philadelphia in Rev. 3 proves that there will be Assemblies of a Philadelphian character when the Lord comes. They will: have only a little strength and may be in numbers down to 2 or 3 (Matt. 18:20). God always has had and always will have a remnant in Corporate or Assembly Testimony when the Lord comes. To such He says, "Hold fast till I come." How necessary, by His grace, in humility and dependence upon Him-self, to continue and hold fast when there is not only dreadful departure on every hand but also a very decided and often very bitter opposition to and persecution of those who for conscience sake towards God and in obedience to His Word are seeking to continue and to hold fast to God's ways for His people. The Lord enable you and me to do so for His glory.

The Devil hates the truth of God that would gather saints in Assembly fellowship (Acts 2:42) unto the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20) and separate them unto Himself (our Lord Jesus Christ, Heb. 13:13) from every unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6) and thus from the Devil's Masterpiece, the False Bride, Babylon, the religious systems of men, all around. When these Divine "Truths" are preached or written for the spiritual preservation and welfare of the people of God, the Devil, Satan, soon finds a tool, and preferably a child of God to whittle away the truth of God and even to persecute God's messenger with God's message for God's people (Hag. 1:13). How sad then to be a carnally minded, a worldly minded (perhaps scholarly) or a spiritually blinded (one whose light has become darkness, Matt. 6:23) believer who can thus be used by Satan.

It is recorded in Joshua concerning the generation that arose after the death of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua that they knew not the ways of the Lord. A generation has arisen in this our day who know not the ways of the Lord but they think they do. They speak and write as if they do. What is the course in such a day as this? By His grace to

continue in the doctrine and teaching of the Word (1 Tim. 4:16), Hold fast His Word, don't deny His Name by associating with any other name (Rev. 3:11) and to make straight paths for our feet (Heb. 12:13). May we not be over-come by what is abounding more and more on every hand, and may we not faint in the day of adversity (Prov. 24:10) when some are suffering for righteousness' sake, for obedience to His Word and perhaps even cast out of the Church like those who had God's commendation for their life and testimony (3 John 10). Diotrephes' disciples, Diotrephes' followers, doing Diotrephes' work are not all dead yet. There may be those who are experiencing what David experienced when he said in 1 Sam. 26:19, "For they have driven me out this day from abiding (Heb. margin, cleaving) in the inheritance of the Lord." It may be some are afraid of speaking the Truth of God because of such action. Jer. 23:28 is God's encouragement to be faithful and how encouraging it is to know that in spite of all that Saul did against David, God put David on the throne. The Lord enable us then to continue and hold fast more tenaciously as the days darken and become more difficult for "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18) and the just are those who walk in the ways of the Lord (Hos. 14:9). Our responsibility is to walk and our God will see to the shining. Oh, to be thus shining brightly for Him till He come and if so shining it will not be, "Being ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

WIS August 1942

Never go anywhere without asking God to accompany you, for you are surrounded by foes and will need your guard; unexpected difficulties may arise, and temptations may assail you and only God may be able to deliver you.

Unique Events in Acts, pt 2

Robert Surgenor

The Samaritan Believers

Walking with Luke we come to the next unique event in Acts 8:12, 14-17. "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women....Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."

Here we find a group of people that received the word of God and believed. Consequently they were baptized. However, as strange as it may seem, they had not yet received the Holy Ghost. Why? Consider the setting in which these people were saved. Up until this point the Church was basically Jewish. What is taking place here is what the Lord told them ere He left them and went back to heaven; "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in -

- (1) Jerusalem, and in all Judaea,
- (2) and in Samaria,
- (3) and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Thus we have a progression. The gospel is first preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judaea, and then it broadens out, through Philip, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, and then to the Gentiles, the uttermost parts of the earth, through Peter in Acts 10.

Bridging Jewish & Samaritan Animosity

If you are familiar with your Bible, you will know that there was animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. Remember the Samaritan woman's words in John 4:9; "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

Notice the wisdom of God how He proceeds to form an indissoluble bond between Jewish believers and Samaritan believers. Apostolic delegates from the Jewish church in Jerusalem had to lay their hands upon the Samaritan believers before that could receive the Holy Ghost. That act formed a brotherly bond.

Samaritans would be made to see that the Jewish church played a part in their blessing, and the Jewish believers would see that through Philip's act they were linked with the Samaritans. This was a unique event, never to be repeated.

The Door of Salvation Opened to the Gentiles

In Acts 10, Peter is appointed by God to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. He was made to see that, "God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:34-35). As he preached the gospel in the house of Cornelius, in Caesarea, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision (the Jewish brethren) which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God" (Acts 10:44-48; 11:1).

You must remember that the day had not yet come when tongues would cease, thus we see an immediate proof that these Gentiles were saved and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The proof of their salvation was undeniable. This was previously unheard of that God would reach over the Jewish wall and save Gentiles. However, this manifestation was so great, that even Jews, who had a set mind, were made to see that the door of salvation was now open to the Gentiles.

This was not a unique event, for the pattern of obtaining salvation was now set, namely, (1) conviction, (2) receiving the word, (3) trusting Christ, (4) immediately indwelt with the Holy Spirit, (5) divine evidence in the individual of having salvation, (6) and then water baptism. This pattern continues on to the end of the Church age.

Disciples of John the Baptist

Coming to Acts 19 we see Paul, upon arriving at Ephesus, finding himself in a very unique situation. Notice: "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve" (Acts 19:1-7).

The question often arises were these twelve men saved when Paul first met them, or were they still in their sins? Some writers seem positive that they were in need of God's salvation. In other words, even though scripture defines them as disciples of John the Baptist, and ones who had believed John's message, yet they were still on the way to hell. Personally, I find it hard to see how sincere men trusting the only God given message of salvation at their disposal, and devoutly serving God would be in hell if they died.

These men, as Matthew Henry says, "were disciples who professed faith in Christ as the true Messiah, but were as yet in the first and lowest form in the school of Christ, under his usher John the Baptist." Henry goes on to say; "they were much of the standing that Apollos was of when he came to Ephesus (for he knew only the baptism of John, Acts 18:25).

Paul was told, probably by Aquila and Priscilla, that they were believers, that they did own Christ, and had given up their names to him; now Paul hereupon takes them under examination."

The problem lay in the fact that they had believed in the Son of God, yet they had not received the Holy Ghost. You can see now that this is a unique event. As the late Jack Hunter once remarked, "They were living in a past dispensation, and Paul would bridge that dispensation by laying his hands on them."

When Paul asked them, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" They answered, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." That is, they had never heard that the promise of the Holy Ghost's coming had actually taken place. It would seem, being disciples of John, that were aware that the Holy Ghost would come, for John, in his baptism, announced Christ as about to baptize with the Holy Ghost, (Matt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16). These believers had not heard that the Holy Spirit, in His gifts, had been given to or received by anyone.

Paul enquired how they came to be baptized, if they knew nothing of the Holy Ghost; for, if they were baptized by any of Christ's ministers, they would have been instructed concerning the Holy Ghost, and would have been baptized in His name ("Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" Matt. 28:19). Paul said to them, "Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, 'Unto John's baptism'."

Some writers claim that some well-meaning disciples of John ignorantly kept up his name as the head of a party, and in a blind zeal for John's doctrine, they baptized here and there in John's name, looking no further themselves, nor directing those that they baptized any further.

Paul shows these ignorant brethren at Ephesus, the true intent and meaning of John's baptism, as basically referring to Jesus Christ, and so rectifies the mistake of those who had baptized them into the baptism of John, and had not directed them to look any further, but to rest in that.

These brethren who were left in ignorance, or led into error, were not despised by Paul, but rather were compassionately instructed, and better taught by Paul. Paul assured them that John's baptism was good as far as it went, they being sorry for their sins, but was never designed that those baptized should rest there, but that John's baptism was designed only to prepare the way of the Lord, and to dispose them to receive the Christ of God. As another has phrased it; "John's baptism was the porch which they were to pass through, not the house in which they were to rest."

When Paul showed them their error, they thankfully accepted the discovery, and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Thus we have the last of the three unique events recorded by Luke in the Book of the Acts.

The Conclusion

Summing it all up we discover believing Jews in Acts 2 not receiving the Holy Spirit until they were baptized, while in Acts 8, the Samaritan believers being baptized could not receive the Holy Spirit until two apostles from the Jerusalem Assembly laid their hands upon them. Finally, in Acts 19, baptized believers did not receive the Holy Spirit until Paul laid his hands upon them.

The order of events as we have it today is found in Acts 10. Sinners hear the word, believe on Christ, and are immediately possessed with the Holy Spirit and consequently baptized soon afterward.

Let us be careful not to seek to build a doctrine on a historical event. History has its place in Holy Scripture. It informs us of God's dealings, purposes and ways. Doctrine is found in the apostolic letters to the assemblies, and inform us of God's desire regarding our Christian behavior, individually and corporately. Paul exhorted Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim.2:15); or as J. N. Darby translates it; "Strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the word of truth."

The Vulgate Latin version renders it, one that "rightly handles"; or, as the Syriac version, that "rightly preaches the word of truth"; who

gives the true sense of Scripture, does not pervert and wrest it, and take from it, or add to it; who points out the truth in it.

This same Greek word is used by the Septuagint in Proverbs 3:6, where it answers to the Hebrew word "rvy", which signifies to direct the way, and make it plain.

A Scripture taken out of context can become a pretext.

Consider the fact that Paul had learned the trade of tent making. Cutting hide or fabric, using a pattern, would require "cutting a straight line," or the various pieces to be joined later, would not fit. All Scripture fits perfectly together when it is interpreted by "cutting a straight line."

The unique events in Acts 2; 8; and 19 would never be repeated again. They give us an insight to the transitional character of Acts and remind us of Paul's exclamation;

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
how unsearchable are His judgments,
and His ways past finding out!"
(Rom. 11:33).

God loves us to be importunate at His throne; He says, "Ask, seek, knock;" that is, persevere until you obtain; He is not pleased when we take DELAYS for DENIALS.

The Peril of the 39th Day

Joel Portman

Exodus 32-33

We learn valuable lessons from the experiences of God's people in the Old Testament. Paul reminds us that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, (Rom. 15:4). One lesson we learn is the importance of waiting patiently for God's time and will to be expressed. It seems that the most difficult test for God's people is to wait for God to work in His own time, while maintaining our faithful responsiveness for the entire period. We naturally get impatient, and though we may be faithful at the first to Him and obedient

to His Word, toward the end we may lose sight of its importance. Times like these can be seen in some periods in the Bible that lasted for forty days, and they all seem to have important lessons for us to learn.

These forty day periods always involved some form of testing. W. T. P. Wolston ("Forty Days of Scripture") says, "It seems to me that it is usually connected with the probation or testing of man, on the one hand, or, in the government of God, with the penalty and judgment of his sin, on the other." He indicates that there are twelve such periods in Scripture. According to F. W. Grant, who studied the significance of numbers in Scripture, forty represents a test that God uses to reveal our own spiritual condition and to develop what is for God. Nine times we read of 40 days, and of those, we also read the added expression, "and nights" five times. These were testings by God according to man's responsibility, and Christ, in the days of His flesh, triumphed in both the 40 days of testing in the wilderness and the 40 days of teaching after His resurrection. Other examples include the rain that fell at the time of the flood for 40 days, Moses was on the mount twice for 40 days each, and the spies searched the land of Canaan for 40 days. Goliath defied the armies of Israel for 40 days, Elijah, in his discouragement, went 40 days into the wilderness to Horeb, and Jonah preached in Nineveh for 40 days.

Again F. W. Grant points out that the Jewish calendar year was 360 days, which is 9 x 40. He suggests that the number 9 is related to finality, so that this typically brings before us the idea of the end of all testing that will finally be reached by God's people.

Israel at Mt. Sinai

In Ex. 32:1, we read that Moses had gone up to the mount and had been there nearly 40 days. When he left the people, he left them no indication of how long he would be gone. They were to wait faithfully until He came down with the tables of the law from the LORD. Sadly, it was a day short of 40, or the 39th day, when they rebelled and fell into false worship. Only one day short of his return and they failed so miserably. Again F. W. Grant associates the number 13 with rebellion (Gen. 14:1-2). So that the

39th day was 3 x 13, and it was then that they rebelled against the leadership of Moses and the presence of God in the camp.

It shouldn't be difficult to see typical teaching in this period of Israel's first failure that apply to us. The last sight that Israel had of Moses prior to this period was of a man who was going up. The church period began in Acts with a Man who went up out of their sight, but who left the promise that He would return. The church is likewise in a period of testing to see if she will remain faithful to the Lord and obedient to His Word until He comes, and we don't know when He will return for His people. His purpose for us is that we maintain faithful testimony to the end ("hold fast that thou hast until I come," Rev. 3:11). It never is His purpose that we should fail! Yet the prophetic perspective is that near the end, in Laodicea, the prevailing condition will be that of failure, with the Lord outside entirely. How dangerous it is to fail when His coming is so near! It would help us to learn some lessons from the condition of God's people during the days when they waited for Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

God's Provision for Faithfulness

Moses had given Israel every provision for them to remain faithful during his absence. The Lord has likewise given us every resource that is necessary to preserve us to the end without stumbling ("Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. . ." Jude 24). We note that

1. 24:1-3 He had given them His Word when He spoke to them from the mount. They had heard His voice and had received His commandments. They were not left without the truth to guard them from committing evil. In the same way, we have received the complete Word of God that is intended to guide us in our conduct during the Lord's absence as well as to guard us from failure. We must give heed to it completely!

2. 24:4-7, they had the altar and 12 pillars to remind them of sacrificial relationship and their national responsibility to maintain testimony for God during that period of time. We have the reality of our Lord Jesus to give opportunity to render worship and praise

to our blessed Lord as well as to make our petitions to our God.

3. 24:8, the blood of the covenant had been sprinkled upon them, and a relationship was established on that basis in which they had promised to obey all that the Lord had said. We have entered into a relationship that involves many great privileges, but it also entails great responsibilities to the Lord.

4. 24:9-11, The responsible men had seen God and had eaten (either meaning that they ate in His presence, or were preserved to eat following the event), and these 72 men and Aaron were left in the camp as witness of the reality and glory of God. Eph. 4 tells us that the resurrected, ascended Christ has given gifted men to the church for the purpose of building it into complete maturity and preserve it.

5. 24:14, Moses had left with the promise of his return, but no indication of when. But they had a sight of God's glory on the mount (v. 16-18). In the same way, we remember the words of the Lord in John 14:3, "I will come again. . ."

So they had no excuse for their failure. What more could the Lord have given them so that they might be preserved from sin? But before we condemn these ancient people, we might well remember that we have received far more than they in the preserving elements that the Lord has left us so that we might be found faithful to Him "when(ever) He appears" (1 Jn. 2:28). Yet we live in a day when it is evident that failure is the mark of the church age, even as it was of those people.

Failure of God's People

What caused their failure? Can we identify some of the causes that might help us in our day of testimony for God? Some of the reasons that they failed were,

1. They became impatient. It was a long time for the people to wait for Moses to return without having a set date. Saul had the same problem, when he failed to wait for Samuel before impatiently offering a burnt offering (1 Sam. 13:8-14). Mt. 24:48 speaks about the evil servant who said "My Lord delayeth his coming", and as a result, he began to smite and mistreat his fellow servants. So, waiting is the most difficult act for most of us.

2. They lost sight of the Man who had gone up with a promise to return. Actually, they lost sight of God, who was always in their midst, and because they had their eyes set on a man, they failed to realize God's presence with them.

3. Those who were in the position as leaders failed. They had been given the sight of the LORD, and they had the responsibility to restrain and lead the people. However, we notice that there is no mention of them, except for the willing yieldedness of Aaron to the wishes of the people. These men didn't maintain the truth nor the purposes of God that had been expressed to them, so they were responsible for the failure.

4. The people reverted to the forms of religious worship that they were accustomed to in Egypt before redemption. They were out of Egypt, but in many ways, but Egypt was never out of them. There was a natural attraction to that form of worship that drew them to imitate it, though at the expense of maintaining worship for the Lord.

What did they do?

1. They made a false god. It was the worship of a bull (Apis in Egypt). Why did they make a calf and not a man's image? Their leaders had seen God on the mount, and certainly He didn't appear to them in this fashion! Bezaleel was commissioned and gifted by God to build the materials of the tabernacle, but he never made a calf. Aaron had never received such a commission. This was the work of their hands out of their imagination. We find that this act had long-term results; Micah possibly did the same in Jud. 17:4, and Jeroboam did the same thing twice (1 Kings 12:28).

2. They instituted a false feast. It was "to the Lord", they said, but though they attached the Lord's Name to it, it was contrary to His will. Actually, they broke 8 of the 10 commandments in one day! They were desecrating the Lord's Name, calling it a feast to the Lord, when it wasn't. Moses had already given them the designated feasts in Ex. 23, so they were not ignorant of God's will.

3. They engaged in false worship. They had a burnt offering and a peace offering, but no sin offering! One can argue that the sin

offering had not been instituted at this point, but its omission indicates also that they didn't feel any need for any offering for their sin. Their actions were imitations of the surrounding pagan worship.

4. They enjoyed a false joy that involved license for fleshly activity. It was not a joy centered on the Lord and His blessing, but on pleasing self and denying the authority of the Lord. They denied what they had promised when they had said, "All that the Lord hath said, we will do."

What were the Results?

1. Lost their relationship with the Lord. In Ex. 32:7, the Lord calls them "thy people" as He spoke to Moses. Sin breaks close fellowship with the Lord, though it does not cause loss of salvation. It will result in the Lord's discipline, as it did here.

2. It required Moses' intercession for them in Ex. 32:11-13. Had it not been for his faithfulness to plead for them before God, they would have been destroyed. His response reminds us of 1 John 2:1-2, and the present work of our advocate toward the Father when we do sin. His plea wasn't based on their virtue, but on God's promises to their fathers. His act displayed Moses' true character, and the Lord's response also revealed His character. He is righteous, but also merciful.

3. The tables of the law were broken before they came into the camp (Ex. 32:11-13). They couldn't be brought into the camp where they had been violated lest severe judgment of God fall upon the entire camp. It was the mercy of Moses to break them rather than bring them into their midst.

4. However, their sin brought a measure of judgment on the entire company as well on their god. They had to drink the bitterness of what they had made that was against God. Sin can be forgiven, but discipline for sin has its consequences.

5. It identified the faithful ones among them, the sons of Levi (Ex. 32:26). There were severe demands made upon them, to carry out judgment on their brethren, but it was essential to preserve the people from God's judgment falling upon all. In the failures of the Corinthian assembly, we read in 1 Cor. 11:19,

"For there must also be heresies (parties, factions) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

6. The tent of meeting, symbolizing God's presence, was removed far off from the camp. There was a separation, and all who desired to meet with God had to remove themselves from the camp and go out to Him. We find a similar expression in Heb. 13:13 where, in view of the corruption and failure of Judaistic religion, the faithful believer was exhorted to "go forth unto Him without the camp". Joshua, in his faithfulness, seems to have permanently remained outside, in the place where God's presence was known.

God's Grace in Restoration

We notice what followed this tragic scene and are encouraged to see that God's purposes were unchanged and His mercy didn't fail. We see that He

1. Renewed His unchanging promise to bring them into the land (34:11)

2. Renewed His covenant with them (34:10) in view of His promise to their fathers.

3. Renewed the ordinance of the feasts (34:18) that they were to celebrate.

4. Renewed His reminder of the claims of redemption (34:20)

5. Renewed another 40 days of testing in Moses' absence (34:28), and this time they remained faithful for the entire period.

6. Gave a new expression of His glory in the face of a man (Moses), (34:29) (2 Cor. 3:7-13, 4:6).

7. Renewed instruction concerning the building of the tabernacle. It was now to be built by God's people who had sinned and failed, but who were now restored through the intercession of the Mediator and through God's mercy to them.

How good of God to preserve them through the fervent intercession of Moses, but we should be conscious of His mercies as well, that with our failures and lack of exercise, He is faithful and His promise is sure. We live in days that resemble this sad event, but may we learn from them and seek to heed the words of the Lord, "Hold fast till I come," (Rev. 2:25) and "be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die," (Rev. 3:2).