

the law and every aspect of the ancient life of Israel. In the Talmudic discussion of the law they add to this ordinance other features quite unknown to the book of Numbers, selecting a particular place in the temple where they say that the rite was administered, and say that it was abolished by a first-century rabbi for a very strange reason. Such evidence is of little value as far as actual events in first-century Jerusalem are concerned. Even assuming, however, that the practice might have been carried on at that time it would certainly not prove anything about the long period from Joshua to David, to Zedekiah, and during the centuries from Ezra to the Maccabees. It is most reasonable to consider the practice in the light of the context as a provision intended only for the wilderness journey. Our chapter teaches that God promised to perform a miracle during that brief period, and there is no other evidence of the existence of any type of 'ordeal' as a judicial procedure anywhere in the history of ancient Israel.

To understand the reason for such a unique procedure on the part of God at this time, we must remember the situation. Man had put God out of his thoughts and tried to forget Him (cf. Rom. i. 21, 28). God had selected one man, Abraham, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees in order that through him and his descendants He should keep alive His testimony and prepare the way for the coming of His Son through whom men should be saved. The witness of God was now confined in this one group of people coming up through the wilderness. If the testimony of this group were destroyed, the existing witness to God would be wiped out and it would be necessary to start to build one all over again. Naturally, therefore, this is one of the comparatively few periods in the Bible where there is an outpouring of divine miracles.

A similar situation existed in the early days of the Christian Church. There also God performed a great number of miracles in order that Satan should not stamp out the Christian witness while it was a very small thing. After it became so large that, if one portion was wiped out and destroyed, other portions would still keep going, miracles ceased.