

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

By C. H. M.

Copyright (c) 1879

CHAPTER THREE

“THEN we turned, and went up the way to Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. And the Lord said unto me, ‘Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.’ So the Lord our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people; and we smote him until none was left to him remaining.

“And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, threescore cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwalled towns a great many. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city. But all the cattle, and the spoil of the cities, we took for a prey to ourselves” (Ver. 1-7).

The divine instructions as to Og, king of Bashan, were precisely similar to those given, in the preceding chapter, with respect to Sihon the Amorite; and in order to understand both, we must look at them purely in the light of the government of God – a subject but little understood, though one of very deep interest and practical importance. We must accurately distinguish between grace and government.

When we contemplate God in government, we see Him displaying His power in the way of righteousness – punishing evil-doers, pouring out vengeance upon His enemies, overthrowing empires, upturning thrones, destroying cities, sweeping away nations, tribes, and peoples. We find Him commanding His people to slay men, women, and little children with the edge of the sword; to set fire to their houses, and turn their cities into desolate heaps.

Again, we hear Him addressing the prophet Ezekiel in the following remarkable words:

“Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled; yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for Me, saith the Lord God” (Ezekiel 21:18-20).

This is a very wonderful passage of Scripture; setting before us a subject which runs through the entire volume of Old Testament scripture – a subject demanding our profound and reverent attention.

Whether we turn to the five books of Moses, to the historical books, to the Psalms, or to the prophets, we find the inspiring Spirit giving us the most minute details of God's actings in government.

We have the deluge in the days of Noah, when the whole earth, with all its inhabitants, with the exception of eight persons, was destroyed by an act of divine government. Men, women, children, cattle, fowl, and creeping things were all swept away and buried beneath the billows and waves of God's righteous judgment.

Then we have, in the days of Lot, the cities of the plain, with all their inhabitants – men, women, and children – in a few short hours, consigned to utter destruction, overthrown by the hand of Almighty God, and buried beneath the deep, dark waters of the Dead Sea. Those guilty cities,

“Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Then, again, as we pass down along the page of inspired history, we see the seven nations of Canaan – men, women, and children – given over into the hands of Israel for unsparing judgment; nothing that breathed was to be left alive.

But, we may truly say, time would fail us even to refer to all the passages of Holy Scripture which set before our eyes the solemn actings of the divine government.

Suffice it to say that the line of evidence runs from Genesis to Revelation – beginning with the deluge and ending with the burning up of the present system of things.

Now, the question is, Are we competent to understand these ways of God in government?

- Is it any part of our business to sit in judgment upon them?
- Are we capable of unraveling the profound and awful mysteries of divine providence?
- Can we – are we called upon to – account for the tremendous fact of helpless babes involved in the judgment of their guilty parents?

Impious infidelity may sneer at these things; morbid sentimentality may stumble over them; but the true believer, the pious Christian, the reverent student of Holy Scripture, will meet them all with this one simple but safe and solid question, **“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”**

This, we may rest assured, reader, is the only true way in which to meet such questions.

If man is to sit in judgment upon the actings of God in government – if he can take upon himself to decide as to what is and what is not worthy of God to do, then, verily, we have lost the true sense of God altogether. And this is just what the devil is aiming at. He wants to lead the heart away from God; and to this end, he leads men to reason and question and speculate in a region which lies as far beyond their ken as Heaven is above the earth.

Can we comprehend God? If we could, we should ourselves be God.

“We comprehend Him not,
Yet earth and Heaven tell,
God sits as Sovereign on the throne,
And ruleth all things well.”

It is at once absurd and impious, in the very highest degree, for puny mortals to dare to question the counsels, enactments, and ways of the almighty Creator and all-wise Governor of the universe. Assuredly, all who do so must sooner or later find out their terrible mistake.

Well would it be for all questioners and cavilers to give heed to the pungent question of the inspired apostle in Romans 9, **“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”**

How simple! How forcible! How unanswerable!

This is the divine method of meeting all the hows and whys of infidel reason.

If the potter has power over the lump of clay which he holds in his hand – a fact which none would think of disputing – how much more has the Creator of all things power over the creatures which His hand has formed! Men may reason and argue interminably as to why God permitted sin to enter; why He did not at once annihilate Satan and his angels; why He allowed the serpent to tempt Eve; why He did not keep her back from eating the forbidden fruit. In short, the haws and whys are endless; but the answer is one:-

“Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?”

How monstrous for a poor worm of the earth to attempt to sit in judgment upon the unsearchable judgments and ways of the Eternal God! What blind and presumptuous folly for a creature, whose understanding is darkened by sin, and who is thus wholly incapable of forming a right judgment about anything divine, heavenly, or eternal, to attempt to decide how God should act in any given case! Alas! alas! it is to be feared that thousands who now argue with great apparent cleverness against the truth of God, will find out their fatal mistake when it will be too late to correct it.

And as to all those who, though very far from taking common ground with the infidel, are nevertheless troubled with doubts and misgivings as to some of God’s ways in government, and

as to the awful question of eternal punishment, * we would earnestly recommend them to study and drink in the spirit of that lovely little psalm 131 – **“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.”**

*** With regard to the solemn subject of eternal punishment, we here offer a few remarks, seeing that so very many, both in England and America, are troubled with difficulties respecting it.**

There are three considerations, which, if duly weighed, will, we think, settle every Christian on the doctrine.

I. The first is this: There are seventy passages in the New Testament where the word “everlasting,” or “eternal,” (αἰώνιος) occurs. It is applied to the “life” which believers possess, to the “mansions” into which they are to be received, to the “glory” which they are to enjoy; it is applied to God (Romans 16:26), to the “salvation” of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Author, to the “redemption”, which He has obtained for us, and to the “Spirit.”

Then, out of the seventy passages referred to above, which the reader can verify in a few moments by a glance at a Greek Concordance, there are seven in which the self-same word is applied to the “punishment” of the wicked, to the “judgment” which is to overtake them, to the “fire” which is to consume them.

Now, the question is, upon what principle, or by what authority, can anyone mark off these seven passages and say that in them the word αἰώνιος does not mean “everlasting,” while in the other sixty-three it does? We consider the statement utterly baseless, and unworthy the attention of any sober mind. We fully admit that, had the Holy Spirit thought proper, when speaking of the judgment of the wicked, to make use of a different word from that used in the other passages, reason would that we should weigh the fact. But no; He uses the same word invariably, so that if we deny eternal punishment, we must deny eternal life, eternal glory, an eternal Spirit, an eternal God, an eternal anything. In short, if punishment be not eternal, nothing is eternal, so far as this argument is concerned. To meddle with this stone in the archway of divine revelation, is to reduce the whole to a mass of ruin around us. And this is just what the devil is aiming at. We are fully persuaded that to deny the truth of eternal punishment is to take the first step on that inclined plane which leads down to the dark abyss of universal skepticism.

II. Our second consideration is drawn from the great truth of the immortality of the soul. We read in the second chapter of Genesis that “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Upon this one passage, as upon an immovable rock, even if we had not another, we build the great truth of the immortality of the human soul. The fall of man made no difference as to this. Fallen or unfallen, innocent or guilty, converted or unconverted, the soul must live forever.

The tremendous question is, Where is it to live? God cannot allow sin into His presence. “He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity.” Hence, if a man dies in his sins – dies unrepentant, unwashed, unpardoned, then, most assuredly, where God is he never can come; indeed, it is the very last place to which he would like to come. There is nothing for him but an endless eternity in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

III. And lastly, we believe that the truth of eternal punishment stands intimately connected with the infinite nature of the atonement of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If nothing short of an infinite sacrifice could deliver us from the consequences of sin, those consequences must be eternal. This consideration may not, perhaps, in the judgment of some, .carry much weight with it; but to us its force is absolutely irresistible. We must measure sin and its consequences as we measure divine love and its results – not by the standard of human sentiment or reason, but only by the standard of the Cross of Christ.

Then, when the heart has in some measure taken in this exquisite breathing, it may turn with real profit to the words of the inspired apostle (II Corinthians 10) – **“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”**

Doubtless, the philosopher, the scholar, the profound thinker, would smile contemptuously at such a childish mode of dealing with such great questions; but this is a very small matter in the judgment of the devout disciple of Christ.

The same inspired apostle makes very short work of all this world’s wisdom and learning. He says, **“Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.’ And again, ‘The Lord knoweth the thoughts’ of the wise, that they are vain’ “ (I Corinthians 3). And again, **“It is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’ Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe”** (I Corinthians 1:19-21).**

Here lies the grand moral secret of the whole matter. Man has to find out that he is simply a fool, and that all the wisdom of the world is foolishness. Humbling but wholesome truth! Humbling, because it puts man in his right place; wholesome, yea, most precious, because it brings in the wisdom of God. We hear a great deal nowadays about science, philosophy, and learning. **“Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”**

Do we fully take in the meaning of these words?

Alas! it is to be feared they are but little understood.

There are not wanting men who would fain persuade us that science has gone far beyond the Bible. *

*** We must distinguish between all true science and “science falsely so called.” And further, we must distinguish between the facts of science, and the conclusions of scientific men. The facts are what God has done and is doing; but when men set about drawing their conclusions from these facts, they make the most serious mistakes.**

However, it is a real relief to the heart to think that there are many philosophers and men of science who give God His right place, and who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Alas! For the science, and for all those who give heed to it. If it has gone beyond the Bible, whither has it gone? In the direction of God, of Christ, of Heaven, of holiness, of peace? Nay; but quite in the opposite direction. And where must it all end? We tremble to think, and feel reluctant to pen the reply. Still, we must be faithful, and declare solemnly that the sure and certain end of that path along which human science is conducting its votaries is the blackness of darkness forever.

“The world by wisdom knew not God.”

What did the philosophy of Greece do for its disciples? It made them the ignorant worshipers of **“AN UNKNOWN GOD.”** The very inscription on their altar published to the universe their ignorance and their shame. And may we not lawfully inquire if philosophy has done better for Christendom than it did for Greece? Has it communicated the knowledge of the true God? Who could dare to say, Yes? There are millions of baptized professors throughout the length and breadth of Christendom who know no more of the true God than those philosophers who encountered Paul in the city of Athens.

The fact is this: everyone who really knows God, is the privileged possessor of eternal life. So our Lord Jesus Christ declares, in the most distinct manner, in the seventeenth chapter of John – **“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”**

This is most precious to every soul that, through grace, has gotten this knowledge. To know God, is to have life-life eternal. But how can I know God? where can I find Him? Can science and philosophy tell me? Have they ever told anyone? have they ever guided any poor wanderer into this way of life and peace? No; never.

“The world by wisdom knew not God.”

The conflicting schools of ancient philosophy could only plunge the human mind into profound darkness and hopeless bewilderment; and the conflicting schools of modern philosophy are not a whit better. They can give no certainty, no safe anchorage, no solid ground of confidence, to the poor benighted soul. Barren speculation, torturing doubt, wild and baseless theory, is all that human philosophy, in any age or of any nation, has to offer to the earnest inquirer after truth.

How, then, are we to know God?

If such a stupendous result hangs on this knowledge, if to know God is life eternal – and Jesus says it is – then how is He to be known? **“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him”** (John 1:18).

Here we have an answer divinely simple, divinely sure. Jesus reveals God to the soul – reveals the Father to the heart. Precious fact!

- We are not sent to creation to learn who God is, though we see His power, wisdom, and goodness there;
- We are not sent to the law, though we see His justice there;
- We are not sent to providence, though we see the profound mysteries of His government there.

No; if we want to know who and what God is, we are to look in the face of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who dwelt in His bosom before all worlds, who was His eternal delight, the object of His affections, the center of His counsels. He it is who reveals God to the soul.

We cannot have the slightest idea of what God is apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **“In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead [θεοτης] bodily.”**
- **“God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.”**

Nothing can exceed the power and blessedness of all this. There is no darkness here, no uncertainty. **“The darkness is past and the true light now shineth.”**

Yes; it shineth in the face of Jesus Christ.

- We can gaze, by faith, on that blessed One;
- we can trace His marvelous path on the earth;
- see Him going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil;
- mark His very looks, His words, His works, His ways;
- see Him healing the sick,
- cleansing the leper,
- opening the eyes of the blind,
- unstopping the ears of the deaf,
- causing the lame to walk,
- the maimed to be whole,
- raising the dead,
- drying the widow’s tears,
- feeding the hungry,
- binding up broken hearts,
- meeting every form of human need,
- soothing human sorrow,
- hushing human fears.

And doing all these things in such a style, with such touching grace and sweetness, as to make each one feel, in his very inmost soul, that it was the deep delight of that loving heart thus to minister to his need.

Now, in all this He was revealing God to man; so that if we want to know what God is, we have simply to look at Jesus.

When Philip said, “**Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us,**” the prompt reply was, “**Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known :Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, ‘Shew us the Father?’ Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works’ sake.**”

Here is true rest for the heart. We know the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent; and this is life eternal. We know Him as our own very God and Father, and Christ as our own personal, loving Lord and Saviour; we can delight in Him, walk with Him, lean on Him, trust in Him, cling to Him, draw from Him, find all our living springs in Him, rejoice in Him all the day long, find our meat and our drink in doing His blessed will, furthering His cause, and promoting His glory.

Reader, do you know all this for yourself?

Say, is it a living, divinely real thing in your own soul this moment? This is true Christianity, and you should not be satisfied with anything less. You will perhaps tell us we have wandered far from the third chapter of Deuteronomy. But whither have we wandered? To the Son of God and to the soul of the reader. If this be wandering, be it so; it most assuredly is not wandering from the object for which we are penning these “*Notes*,” which is, to bring Christ and the soul together, or to bind them together, as the case may be.

We would never, for one moment, lose sight of the fact that, both in writing and speaking, we have not merely to expound Scripture, but to seek the salvation and blessing of souls. Hence it is that we feel constrained, from time to time, to appeal to the heart and conscience of the reader, as to his practical state, and as to how far he has made his very own of these imperishable realities which pass in review before us. And we earnestly beseech the reader, whoever he may be, to seek a deeper acquaintance with God in Christ; and, as a sure consequence of this, a closer walk with Him and more thorough consecration of heart to Him.

This, we are thoroughly persuaded, is what is needed in this day of unrest and unreality in the world, and of lukewarmness and indifference in the professing church.

We want a very much higher standard of personal devotedness, more real purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord and follow Him. There is much – very much to discourage and hinder in the condition of things around us.

The language of the men of Judah in the days of Nehemiah may, with some measure of appropriateness and force, be applied to our times, - **“The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish.”** But, thank God, the remedy now, as then, is to be found in this soul-stirring sentence, **“Remember the Lord.”**

We now return to our chapter, in the remainder of which the lawgiver rehearses in the ears of the congregation the story of their dealings with the two kings of the Amorites, together with the facts connected with the inheritance of the two tribes and a half on the wilderness side of Jordan.

The Settlement of the Two and a half tribes

And with regard to the latter subject, it is interesting to notice that he raises no question as to the right or the wrong of their choosing their possession short of the land of promise. Indeed, from the narrative given here, it could not be known that the two tribes and a half had expressed any wish in the matter. So far is our book from being a mere repetition of its predecessors.

Here are the words:

“And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half Mount Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I unto the Reubenites and to the Gadites. And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of giants . . . And I gave Gilead unto Machir. And unto the Reubenites and unto the Gadites I gave from Gilead even unto the river Arnon half the valley, and the border even unto the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon . . . And I commanded you at that time, saying, *The Lord your God hath given you this land to possess it:*” – not a word about their having asked it – **“ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all that are meet for the war. But your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle (for I know that ye have much cattle), shall abide in your cities which I have given you; until the Lord have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and until they also possess the land which the Lord your God hath given them beyond Jordan; and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you.”**

In our studies on the book of Numbers, we have dwelt upon certain facts connected with the settlement of the two tribes and a half, proving that they were below the mark of the Israel of God in choosing their inheritance any where short of the other side of Jordan; but in the passage we have just quoted, there is no allusion at all to this side of the question, because the object of Moses is to set before the whole congregation the exceeding goodness, loving-kindness, and faithfulness of God, not only in bringing them through all the difficulties and dangers of the wilderness, but also in giving them, even already, such signal victories over the Amorites, and putting them in possession of regions so attractive and so suited to them.

In all this, he is laying down the solid basis of the Lord’s claim upon their hearty obedience to His commandments; and we can at once see and appreciate the moral beauty of overlooking entirely, in such a rehearsal, the question as to whether Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh were wrong in stopping short of the land of promise.

It is, to every devout Christian, a striking proof, not only of the touching and exquisite grace of God, but also of the divine perfectness of Scripture.

No doubt, every true believer enters upon the study of Scripture with the full and deeply wrought conviction of its absolute perfectness in every part. He reverently believes that there is not, from the opening of Genesis to the close of Revelation, a single flaw, a single hitch, a single discrepancy – not one; all is as perfect as its divine Author.

But then the cordial belief of the divine perfectness of Scripture as a whole can never lessen our appreciation of the evidences which come out in detail; nay, it enhances it exceedingly.

Thus, for example, in the passage now before us, is it not perfectly beautiful to mark the absence of all reference to the failure of the two tribes and a half in the matter of choosing their inheritance, seeing that any such reference would be entirely foreign to the object of the lawgiver and to the scope of the book?

Is it not the joy of our hearts to trace such infinite perfections, such exquisite and inimitable touches? Assuredly it is; and not only so, but we are persuaded that the more the moral glories of the volume dawn upon our souls, and its living and exhaustless depths are unfolded to our hearts, the more we shall be convinced at the utter folly of infidel assaults upon it, and of the feebleness and gratuitousness of many well-meant efforts to prove that it does not contradict itself.

Thank God, His Word stands in no need of human apologists.

It speaks for itself, and carries with it its own powerful evidences; so that we can say of it what the apostle says of his Gospel, that **“if it be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”**

We are more and more convinced each day, that the most effective method of answering all infidel attacks upon the Bible is, to cherish a more profound faith in its divine power and authority, and to use it as those who are most thoroughly persuaded of its truth and preciousness.

The Spirit of God alone can enable anyone to believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

Human arguments may go for what they are worth; they may doubtless silence gainsayers, but they cannot reach the heart – they cannot bring the genial rays of divine revelation to bear down in living, saving power upon the soul. This is a work divine; and until it is done, all the evidences and arguments in the world must leave the soul in the moral darkness of unbelief; but when it is done, there is no need of human testimony in defense of the Bible.

External evidences, however interesting and valuable (and they are both), cannot add a single jot or tittle to the glory of that peerless revelation, which bears on every page, every paragraph, every sentence, the clear impress of its divine Author.

As with the sun in the heavens, its every ray tells of the Hand that made it, so of the Bible, its every sentence tells of the Heart that inspired it. But inasmuch as a blind man cannot see the sunlight, so neither can the unconverted soul see the force and beauty of Holy Scripture. The eye must be anointed with heavenly eye-salve ere the infinite perfections of the divine volume can be discerned or appreciated.

Now, we must own to the reader that it is the deep and ever-deepening sense of all this that has led us to the determination not to occupy his time or our own by reference to the attacks which have been made by rationalistic writers on that portion of the Word of God with which we are now engaged. We leave this to other and abler hands. What we desire for ourselves and our readers is, that we may feed in peace upon the green pastures which the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls has graciously thrown open to us; that we may help each other, as we pass along, to see more and more of the moral glory of that which lies before us, and thus to build each other up on our most holy faith.

This will be far more grateful work to us, and we trust also to our readers, than replying to men who, in all their puny efforts to find out flaws in the holy volume, only prove, to those capable of judging, that they understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm. If men will abide in the dark vaults and tunnels of a dreary infidelity, and there find fault with the sun, or deny that it shines at all, let it be ours to bask in the light, and help others to do the same.

We shall now dwell for a little on the remaining verses of our chapter, in which we shall find much to interest, instruct, and profit us.

And first, Moses rehearses in the ears of the people his charge to Joshua – **“And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, ‘Thine eyes have seen all that the Lord our God hath done unto these two kings; so shall the Lord do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. Ye shall not fear them; for the Lord your God He shall fight for you’** “ (Ver. 21, 22).

The remembrance of the Lord’s dealings with us in the past should strengthen our confidence in going on.

The One who had given His people such a victory over the Amorites, who had destroyed such a formidable foe as Og, king of Bashan, and given into their hands all the land of the giants, what could He not do for them?

They could hardly expect to encounter in all the land of Canaan any enemy more powerful than Og, whose bedstead was of such enormous dimensions as to call for the special notice of Moses; but what was he in the presence of his almighty Creator? Dwarfs and giants are all alike to Him. The grand point is to keep God Himself ever before our eyes; then difficulties vanish. If He covers the eyes, we can see nothing else; and this is the true secret of peace, and the real power of progress. **“Thine eyes have seen all that the Lord your God hath done.”** And as He has done, so He will do. He hath delivered, and He doth deliver, and He will deliver. Past, present, and future are all marked by divine deliverance.

Reader, art thou in any difficulty? Is there any pressure upon thee? Art thou anticipating, with nervous apprehension, some formidable evil? Is thine heart trembling at the very thought of it? It may be thou art like one who has come to the far end, like the apostle Paul in Asia – **“Pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.”**

If so, beloved friend, accept a word of encouragement. It is our deep and earnest desire to strengthen your hands in God, and to encourage your heart to trust Him for all that is before you. **“Fear not;”** only believe. He never fails a trusting heart – no, never. Make use of the resources which are treasured up for you in Him. Just put yourself, your surroundings, your fears, your anxieties, all into His hands, and leave them there.

Yes, leave them there. It is of little use your putting your difficulties, your necessities, into His hands and then, almost immediately, taking them into your own. We often do this. When in pressure, in need, in deep trial of some kind or other, we go to God in prayer, we cast our burden upon Him and seem to get relief; but, alas! no sooner have we risen from our knees than we begin again to look at the difficulty, ponder the trial, dwell upon all the sorrowful circumstances, until we are again at our very wits’ end.

Now, this will never do. It sadly dishonors God, and, of course, leaves us unrelieved and unhappy. He would have our minds as free from care as the conscience is free from guilt. His word to us is, **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”** And what then? **“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [or garrison – φρουρησει] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**

Thus it was that Moses, that beloved man of God and honored servant of Christ, sought to encourage his fellow-laborer and successor, Joshua, in reference to all that was before him – **“Ye shall not fear them; for the Lord your God He shall fight for you.”** Thus, too, did the blessed apostle Paul encourage his beloved son’ and fellow-servant Timothy to trust in the living God; to be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; to lean, with unshaken confidence, on God’s sure foundation; to commit himself, with unquestioning assurance, to the authority, teaching, and guidance of the Holy Scriptures; and thus armed and furnished, to give himself, with holy diligence and true spiritual courage, to that work to which he was called.

And thus, too, the writer and the reader can encourage one another, in these days of increasing difficulty, to cling, in simple faith, to that Word which is settled forever in Heaven; to have it hidden in the heart as a living power and authority in the soul – something that will sustain us, though heart and flesh should fail, and though we had not the countenance or support of a human being.

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (I Peter 1:24, 25).

How precious is this! What comfort and consolation! What stability and rest! What real strength, victory, and moral elevation!

It is not within the compass of human language to set forth the preciousness of the Word of God, or to define, in adequate terms, the comfort of knowing that the self-same Word which is settled forever in Heaven, and which shall endure throughout the countless ages of eternity, is that which has reached our hearts in the glad tidings of the Gospel, imparting to us eternal life, and giving us peace and rest in the finished work of Christ, and a perfectly satisfying object in His adorable Person.

Truly, as we think of all this, we cannot but own that every breath should be a hallelujah. Thus it shall be by and by, and that forever, all homage to His peerless name!

The closing verses of our chapter present a peculiarly touching passage between Moses and his Lord, the record of which, as given here, is in lovely keeping, as we might expect, with the character of the entire book of Deuteronomy:

“And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, ‘O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy mighty hand; for what god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to Thy works and according to Thy might? I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.’ But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, ‘Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see’ “ (Ver. 23-28).

It is very affecting to find this eminent servant of God urging a request which could not be granted.

He longed to see that good land beyond Jordan. The portion chosen by the two tribes and a half could not satisfy his heart; he desired to plant his foot upon the proper inheritance of the Israel of God. But it was not to be. He had spoken unadvisedly with his lips at the waters of Meribah; and, by the solemn and irreversible enactment of the divine government, he was prohibited from crossing the Jordan.

All this, the beloved servant of Christ most meekly rehearses in the ears of the people.

He does not hide from them the fact that the Lord had refused to grant his request. True, he had to remind them that it was on their account – that was morally needful for them to hear; still he tells them, in the most unreserved manner, that the Lord was wroth with him, and that He refused to hear him – refused to allow him to cross the Jordan, and called upon him to resign his office and appoint his successor.

Now, it is most edifying to hear all this from the lips of Moses himself. It teaches us a fine lesson, if only we are willing to learn it.

Some of us find it very hard indeed to confess that we have done or said anything wrong – very hard to own before our brethren that we have entirely missed the Lord’s mind in any particular case. We are careful of our reputation; we are touchy and tenacious. And yet, with strange inconsistency, we admit, or seem to admit, in general terms, that we are poor, feeble, erring creatures; and that, if left to ourselves, there is nothing too bad for us to say or to do.

But it is one thing to make a most humiliating general confession, and another thing altogether to own that, in some given case, we have made a gross mistake. This latter is a confession which very few have grace to make. Some can hardly ever admit that they have done wrong.

Not so that honored servant whose words we have just quoted.

He, notwithstanding his elevated position as the called, trusted, and beloved servant of the Lord – the leader of the congregation, whose rod had made the land of Egypt to tremble, was not ashamed to stand before the whole assembly of his brethren and confess his mistake – own that he had said what he ought not, and that he had earnestly urged a request which the Lord could not grant.

Does this lower Moses in our estimation? The very reverse: it raises him immensely.

It is morally lovely to hear his confession, to see how meekly he bows his head to the governmental dealings of God, to mark the unselfishness of his acting toward the man who was to succeed him in his high office. There was not a trace of jealousy or envy; no exhibition of mortified pride. With beautiful self-emptiness he steps down from his elevated position, throws his mantle over the shoulders of his successor, and encourages him to discharge, with holy fidelity, the duties of that high office which he himself had to resign.

“He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

How true was this in Moses’ case! He humbled himself under the mighty hand of God. He accepted the holy discipline imposed upon him by the divine government. He uttered not a murmuring word at the refusal of his request; he bows to it all, and hence he was exalted in due time.

If government kept him out of Canaan, grace conducted him to Pisgah’s top, from whence, in company with his Lord, he was permitted to see that good land, in all its fair proportions – see it, not as inherited by Israel, but as given of God.

The reader will do well to ponder deeply the subject of grace and government.

It is indeed a very weighty and practical theme, and one largely illustrated in Scripture, though but little understood amongst us. It may seem wonderful to us, hard to be understood, that one so beloved as Moses should be refused an entrance into the Promised Land; but in this we see the solemn action of the divine government, and we have to bow our heads and worship. It was not merely that Moses, in his official capacity, or as representing the legal system, could not bring Israel into the land. This is true; but it is not all.

Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips. He and Aaron his brother failed to glorify God, in the presence of the congregation, and for this cause:

“The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, ‘Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.’ “ And again, we read, “The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, ‘Aaron shall be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.’ “

All this is most solemn. Here we have the two leading men in the congregation, the very men whom God had used to bring His people out of the land of Egypt, with mighty signs and wonders – **“that Moses and Aaron”** – men highly honored of God, and yet refused entrance into Canaan. And for what? Let us mark the reason – **“Because ye rebelled against My word.”**

Let these words sink down into our hearts. It is a terrible thing to rebel against the Word of God; and the more elevated the position of those who so rebel, the more serious it is in every way, and the more solemn and speedy must be the divine judgment.

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

These are weighty words, and we ought to ponder them deeply. They were uttered in the ears of Saul, when he had failed to obey the word of the Lord; and thus we have before us examples of a prophet, a priest, and a king, all judged, under the government of God, for an act of disobedience. The prophet and the priest were refused entrance into the land of Canaan, and the king was deprived of his throne, simply because they disobeyed the word of the Lord.

Let us remember this.

We, in our fancied wisdom, might deem all this very severe. Are we competent judges? This is a grand question in all such matters.

Let us beware how we presume to sit in judgment on the enactments of divine government. Adam was driven out of paradise, Aaron was stripped of his priestly robes, Moses was sternly refused entrance into Canaan, and Saul was deprived of his kingdom – and for what? Was it for what men would call a grave moral offense – some scandalous sin. No; it was, in each case, for neglecting the word of the Lord.

This is the serious thing for us to keep before us, in this day of human willfulness, in which men undertake to set up their own opinions, to think for themselves, and judge for themselves, and act for themselves.

Men proudly put the question, “Has not every man a right to think for himself?”

We reply, Most certainly not. We have a right to obey. To obey what? Not the commandments of men, not the authority of the so-called church, not the decrees of general Councils. in a word, not any merely human authority, call it. what you please, but simply the Word of the living God – the testimony of the HOLY GHOST – the voice of Holy Scripture.

This it is that justly claims our implicit, unhesitating, unquestioning obedience.

To this we are to bow down our whole moral being. We are not to reason, we are not to speculate, we are not to weigh consequences, we have nothing to do with results, we are not to say “Why?” or “Wherefore?” It is ours to obey, and leave all the rest in the hands of our Master. What has a servant to do with consequences? what business has he to reason as to results? It is of the very essence of a servant to do what he is told, regardless of all other considerations.

Had Adam remembered this, he would not have been turned out of Eden; had Moses and Aaron remembered it, they might have crossed the Jordan; had Saul remembered it, he would not have been deprived of his throne. And so, as we pass down along the stream of human history, we see this weighty principle illustrated over and over again; and we may rest assured, it is a principle of abiding and universal importance.

And be it remembered, we are not to attempt to weaken this great principle by any reasonings grounded upon God’s foreknowledge of all that was to happen, and all that man would do, in the course of time. Men do reason in this way, but it is a fatal mistake.

What has God’s foreknowledge to do with man’s responsibility? Is man responsible, or not? This is the question. If, as we most surely believe, he is, then nothing must be allowed to interfere with this responsibility.

Man is called to obey the plain Word of God; he is in no wise responsible to know aught about God’s secret purposes and counsels. Man’s responsibility rests upon what is revealed, not upon what is secret.

What, for example, did Adam know about God’s eternal plans and purposes when he was set in the garden of Eden and forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Was his transgression in any wise modified by the stupendous fact that God took occasion from that very transgression to display, in the view of all created intelligences, His glorious scheme of redemption through the blood of the Lamb? Clearly not. He received a plain commandment, and by that commandment his conduct should have been absolutely governed. He disobeyed, and was driven out of paradise into a world which has, for well-nigh six thousand years, exhibited the terrible consequences of one single act of disobedience – the act of taking the forbidden fruit.

True it is, blessed be God, that grace has come into this poor sin-stricken world and there reaped a harvest which could never have been reaped in the fields of an unfallen creation. But man was judged for his transgression; he was driven out by the hand of God in government, and by an enactment of that government, he has been compelled to eat bread in the sweat of his brow.

“Whatsoever a man [no matter who] soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Here we have the condensed statement of the principle which runs all through the Word, and is illustrated on every page of the history of God's government. It demands our very gravest consideration. It is, alas! but little understood.

We allow our minds to get under the influence of one-sided and therefore false ideas of grace, the effect of which is most pernicious.

Grace is one thing, and government is another: they must never be confounded. We would earnestly impress upon the heart of the reader the weighty fact that the most magnificent display of God's sovereign grace can never interfere with the solemn enactments of His government.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
