

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

by

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Exodus 17

“And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?” (Exodus 17:1, 2).

Did we not know something of the humiliating evil of our own hearts, we should be quite at a loss to account for Israel’s marvellous insensibility to all the Lord’s goodness, faithfulness, and mighty acts. They had just seen bread descending from Heaven to feed six hundred thousand people in the wilderness: and now they are **“ready to stone”** Moses for bringing them out into the wilderness to kill them with thirst. Nothing can exceed the desperate unbelief and wickedness of the human heart, save the superabounding grace of God. In that grace alone can any one find relief under the growing sense of his evil nature which circumstances tend to make manifest.

Had Israel been transported directly from Egypt to Canaan, they would not have made such sad exhibitions of what the human heart is; and, as a consequence, they would not have proved such admirable ensamples or types for us; but their forty years’ wandering in the desert furnishes us with a volume of warning, admonition, and instruction, fruitful beyond conception. From it we learn, amongst many other things, the unvarying tendency of the heart to distrust God. Anything, in short, for it but God. It would rather lean upon a cobweb of human resources than upon the arm of an Omnipotent, all-wise, and infinitely gracious God; and the smallest cloud is more than sufficient to hide from its view the light of His blessed countenance. Well, therefore, may it be termed **“An evil heart of unbelief”** which will ever show itself ready to **“depart from the living God.”**

It is interesting to note the two great questions raised by unbelief, in this and the preceding chapter. They are precisely similar to those which spring up, within and around us, every day, namely, **“what shall we eat? and what shall we drink?”** We do not find the people raising the third question in the category, “wherewithal shall we be clothed?” But here are the questions of the wilderness, “What!” “Where!” “How?” Faith has a brief but comprehensive answer to all the three, namely, God! Precious, perfect, answer!

Oh! that the writer and the reader were more thoroughly acquainted with its force and fullness! We assuredly need to remember, when placed in a position of trial, that **“there hath no temptation taken us but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, (or an “issue” ekbasin,) that ye may be able to bear it”** (I Corinthians 10:13).

Whenever we get into trial, we may feel confident that, with the trial, there is an issue, and all we need is a broken will and a single eye to see it.

“And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying; What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel” (Ver. 4-6).

Thus all is met by the most perfect grace. Every murmur brings out a fresh display. Here we have the refreshing stream gushing from the smitten rock - beautiful type of the Spirit given as the fruit of Christ's accomplished sacrifice.

- In Exodus 16 we have a type of Christ coming down from Heaven to give life to the world.
- In Exodus 17 we have a type of the Holy Ghost **“shed forth,”** in virtue of Christ's finished work.

“They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that, Rock was Christ” (I Corinthians 10:4).

But who could drink till the Rock was smitten? Israel might have gazed on that rock and died of thirst while gazing; but, until smitten by the rod of God, it could yield no refreshment. This is plain enough. The Lord Jesus Christ was the center and foundation of all God's counsels of love and mercy. Through Him all blessing was to flow to man. The streams of grace were designed to gush forth from **“the Lamb of God;”** but then it was needful that the Lamb should be slain - that the work of the Cross should be an accomplished fact, ere any of these things could be actualized.

It was when the Rock of ages was cleft by the hand of the Lord, that the flood-gates of eternal love were thrown wide open, and perishing sinners invited by the testimony of the Holy Ghost to **“drink abundantly,”** drink deeply, drink freely.

“The gift of the Holy Ghost” is the result of the Son's accomplished work upon the Cross. **“The promise of the Father”** could not be fulfilled until Christ had taken His seat at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, having wrought out perfect righteousness, answered all the claims of holiness, magnified the law and made it honourable, borne the unmitigated wrath of God against sin, exhausted the power of death, and deprived the grave of its victory.

He, having done all this, **“ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things”** (Ephesians 4:8-10).

This is the true foundation of the Church’s peace, blessedness, and glory, for ever.

Until the rock was smitten, the stream was pent up, and man could do nothing. What human hand could bring forth water from a flinty rock? And so, we may ask, what human righteousness could afford a warrant for opening the flood-gates of divine love? This is the true way in which to test man’s competency. He could not, by his doings, his sayings, or his feelings, furnish a ground for the mission of the Holy Ghost. Let him be or do what he may, he could not do this. But thank God, it is done; Christ has finished the work; the true Rock has been smitten, and the refreshing stream has issued forth, so that thirsty souls may drink.

“The water that I shall give him,” says Christ, **“shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:14). Again; **“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified”** (John 7:37-39; compare, also, Acts 19:2).

Thus, as in the manna, we have a type of Christ, so in the stream gushing from the rock we have a type of the Holy Ghost. **“If thou knewest the gift of God, (i.e., Christ) . . . thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water,”** - i.e., the Spirit.

Such, then, is the teaching conveyed to the spiritual mind by the smitten rock; but the name of the place in which this significant type was presented is a standing memorial of man’s unbelief.

“He called the name of the place Massah (i.e., *temptation*,) and Meribah, (i.e., *chiding*,) because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?” (Ver. 7).

After such repeated assurances and evidences of the Lord’s presence, to raise such an enquiry proves the deep-seated unbelief of the human heart. It was? in point of fact, tempting Him. Thus did the Jews, in the day of Christ’s presence amongst them, seek of Him a sign from Heaven, tempting Him. Faith never acts thus; it believes in, and enjoys, the divine presence, not by a sign, but by the knowledge of Himself. It knows He is there to be enjoyed, and it enjoys Him. Lord, grant us a more artless spirit of confidence.

The next point suggested by our chapter is one of special interest to us.

“Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in mine hand” (Ver. 8, 9).

The gift of the Holy Ghost leads to conflict. The light rebukes and conflicts with the darkness. Where all is dark there is no struggle; but the very feeblest struggle bespeaks the presence of light. **“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye should not do the things that ye would”** (Galatians 5:17). Thus it is in the chapter before us; we have the rock smitten and the water flowing forth, and immediately we read, **“then came Amalek and fought with Israel.”**

This is the first time that Israel is seen in conflict with an external foe. Up to this point, the Lord had fought for them, as we read in Exodus 14. **“The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”** But now the word is, **“choose us out men.”**

True, God must now fight *in Israel*, as, before, He had fought *for Israel*. This marks the difference, as to the type; and as to the antitype, we know that there is an immense difference between Christ’s battles for us, and the Holy Ghost’s battles in us. The former, blessed be God, are all over, the victory gained, and a glorious and an everlasting peace secured. The latter, on the contrary, are still going on.

Pharaoh and Amalek represent two different powers or influences:

- Pharaoh represents the hindrance to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt; Amalek represents the hindrance to their walk with God through the wilderness.
- Pharaoh used the things of Egypt to keep Israel from serving the Lord; he, therefore, prefigures Satan, who uses **“this present evil world”** against the people of God. Amalek, on the other hand, stands before us as the type of the flesh.

He was the grandson of Esau, who preferred a mess of pottage to the birthright. (See Genesis 36:12). He was the first who opposed Israel, after their baptism **“in the cloud and in the sea.”** These facts serve to fix his character with great distinctness; and, in addition to these, we know that Saul was set aside from the kingdom of Israel, in consequence of his failing to destroy Amalek. (I Samuel 15). And, further, we find that Haman is the last of the Amalekites of whom we find any notice in scripture. He was hanged on a gallows, in consequence of his wicked attempt against the seed of Israel. (See Esther). No Amalekite could obtain entrance into the congregation of the Lord. And, finally, in the chapter now before us, the Lord declares perpetual war with Amalek.

All these circumstances may be regarded as furnishing conclusive evidence of the fact that Amalek is a type of the flesh.

The connection between his conflict with Israel and the water flowing out of the rock is most marked and instructive, and in full keeping with the believer’s conflict with his evil nature, which conflict is, as we know, consequent upon his having the new nature, and the Holy Ghost dwelling therein. Israel’s conflict began when they stood in the full power of redemption, and had tasted **“that spiritual meat and drunk of that spiritual Rock.”**

Until they met Amalek, they had nothing to do.

- They did not cope with Pharaoh.
- They did not break the power of Egypt nor snap asunder the chains of its thralldom.
- They did not divide the sea or submerge Pharaoh's hosts beneath its waves.
- They did not bring down bread from Heaven, or draw forth water out of the flinty rock.
- They neither had done, nor could they do, any of these things;
- But now they are called to fight with Amalek.

All the previous conflict had been between the Lord and the enemy. They had but to “**stand still**” and gaze upon the mighty triumphs of the Lord's outstretched arm and enjoy the fruits of victory. The Lord had fought for them; but now He fights in or by them.

Thus is it also with the Church of God.

The victories on which her eternal peace and blessedness are founded were gained, single-handed, by Christ for her. He was alone on the Cross, alone in the tomb. The Church had to stand aside, for how could she be there? How could she vanquish Satan, endure the wrath of God, or rob death of its sting? Impossible. These things lay far beyond the reach of sinners, but not beyond the reach of Him who came to save them, and who alone was able to bear upon his shoulder the ponderous weight of all their sins, and roll the burden away for ever, by His infinite sacrifice, so that God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from God the Father, in virtue of the perfect atonement of God the Son, can take up His abode in the Church collectively, and in each member thereof individually.

Now it is when the Holy Ghost thus takes up His abode in us, consequent upon Christ's death and resurrection, that our conflict begins. Christ has *fought for us*; the Holy Ghost *fights in us*.

The very fact of our enjoying this first rich spoil of victory, puts us into direct conflict with the foe. But the comfort is that we are victors ere we enter upon the field of conflict at all. The believer approaches to the battle singing, “**Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**” (I Corinthians 15:57). We do not, therefore, fight uncertainly or as those that beat the air, while we seek to keep under the body and bring it into subjection. (I Corinthians 9:26, 27). “**We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us**” (Romans 8:37). The grace in which we stand renders the flesh utterly void of power to lord it over us. (See Romans 6 passim). If the law is “**the strength of sin,**” grace is the weakness thereof. The former gives *sin power over us*; the latter gives us *power over sin*.

“And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said unto him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Verses 9-13).

We have, here, two distinct things, namely, conflict and intercession.

Christ is on high for us, while the Holy Ghost carries on the mighty struggle in us. The two things go together. It is as we enter, by faith, into the prevalency of Christ's intercession on our behalf, that we make head against our evil nature. Some there are who seek to overlook the fact of the Christian's conflict with the flesh. They look upon regeneration as a total change or renewal of the old nature. Upon this principle, it would, necessarily, follow that the believer has nothing to struggle with. If my nature is renewed, what have I to contend with? Nothing. There is nothing within, inasmuch as my old nature is made new; and nothing without can affect me, inasmuch as there is no response from within. The world has no charms for one whose flesh is entirely changed; and Satan has nothing by or on which to act. To all who maintain such a theory, it may be said that they seem to forget the place which Amalek occupies in the history of the people of God.

Had Israel conceived the idea that, when Pharaoh's hosts were gone, their conflict was at an end, they would have been sadly put about when Amalek came upon them. The fact is, theirs only then began. Thus it is with the believer, for **"all these things happened unto Israel for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition,"** (I Corinthians 10:11). But there could be no "type," no "ensample," no admonition" in "these things," for one whose old nature is made new. Indeed, such an one can have but little need of any of those gracious provisions which God has made in His kingdom for those who are the subjects thereof.

We are distinctly taught in the Word that the believer carries about with him that which answers to Amalek, that is, **"the flesh" - "the old man" - "the carnal mind"** (Romans 6:6; Romans 8:7; Galatians 5:17). Now, if the Christian, upon perceiving the stirrings of his evil nature, begins to doubt his being a Christian, he will not only render himself exceedingly unhappy, but also deprive himself of his vantage ground against the enemy. The flesh exists in the believer and will be there to the end of the chapter. The Holy Ghost fully recognizes it as existing, as we may easily see, from various parts of the New Testament. In Romans 6 we read, **"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies."** Such a precept would be entirely uncalled for if the flesh were not existing in the believer. It would be out of character to tell us not to let sin reign, if it were not actually dwelling in us. There is a great difference between dwelling and reigning. It dwells in a believer, but it reigns in an unbeliever. However, though it dwells in us, we have, thank God, a principle of power over it. **"Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace."**

The grace which, by the Blood of the Cross, has put away sin, insures us the victory, and gives us present power over its indwelling principle.

We have died to sin, and hence it has no claim over us. He that has died is justified from sin. **"Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified together, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"** (Romans 6:6). **"And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."** All was victory; and the Lord's banner floated over the triumphant host, bearing the sweet and heart-sustaining inscription, **"Jehovah-nissi"** (*the Lord my banner*).

The assurance of victory should be as complete as the sense of forgiveness, seeing both alike are founded upon the great fact that Jesus died and rose again. It is in the power of this that the believer enjoys a purged conscience and subdues indwelling sin. The death of Christ having answered all the claims of God in reference to our sins, His resurrection becomes the spring of power, in all the details of conflict, afterwards. He died for us, and now He lives in us. The former gives us peace, the latter gives us power.

It is edifying to remark the contrast between Moses on the hill and Christ on the throne.

- The hands of our great Intercessor can never hang down.
- His intercession never fluctuates - “**He ever liveth to make intercession for us**” (Hebrews 7).
- His intercession is never-ceasing and all-prevailing.
- Having taken His place on high, in the power of divine righteousness, He acts for us, according to what He is, and according to the infinite perfectness of what He has done.
- His hands can never hang down, nor can He need any one to hold them up.
- His perfect advocacy is founded upon His perfect sacrifice.

He presents us before God, clothed in His own perfections, so that though we may ever have to keep our faces in the dust in the sense of what we are, yet the Spirit can only testify to us of what He is before God for us, and of what we are in Him. “**We are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**” (Romans 8).

- We are in the body, as to the fact of our condition; but we are not in the flesh, as to the principle of our standing.
- The flesh is in us, though we are dead to it; but we are not in the flesh, because we are alive with Christ.

We may further remark, on this chapter, that Moses had the rod of God with him on the hill - the rod with which he had smitten the rock. This rod was the expression or symbol of the power of God, which is seen alike in atonement and intercession. When the work of atonement was accomplished, Christ took His seat in Heaven, and sent down the Holy Ghost to take up His abode in the Church; so that there is an inseparable connection between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. There is the application of the power of God in each.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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