

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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Exodus 18

We here arrive at the close of a very marked division of the book of Exodus. We have seen God, in the exercise of His perfect grace, visiting and redeeming His people; bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt; delivering them, first, from the hand of Pharaoh and then from the hand of Amalek. Furthermore, we have seen, in the manna, a type of Christ come down from Heaven; in the rock, a type of Christ smitten for His people; and in the gushing stream, a type of the Spirit given. Then follows, in striking and beautiful order, a picture of the future glory, divided into its three grand departments, namely, **“the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God.”**

During the period of Moses' rejection by his brethren he was taken apart and presented with a bride - the companion of his rejection. We were led to see, at the opening of this book, the character of Moses' relationship with this bride. He was *“a husband by blood”* to her. This is precisely what Christ is to the Church - her connection with Him is founded upon death and resurrection; and she is called to fellowship with His sufferings. It is, as we know, during the period of Israel's unbelief, and of Christ's rejection, that the Church is called out; and when the Church is complete, according to the divine counsels, when the **“fullness of the Gentiles is come in,”** Israel shall again be brought into notice.

Thus it was with Zipporah and Israel of old. Moses had sent her back, during the period of his mission to Israel; and when the latter were brought forth as a fully delivered people, we read that:

“Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, and her two sons, of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land; and the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God. And he said unto Moses, I thy father-in-law, Jethro, am come unto thee, and thy wife and her two sons with her. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh, and the Egyptians, for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them.

“And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom he had delivered from the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh; who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them. And Jethro Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God” (Exodus 18:2-12).

This is a deeply interesting scene. The whole congregation assembled, in triumph before the Lord - the Gentile presenting sacrifice - and in addition, to complete the picture, the Bride of the deliverer, together with the children whom God had given him, are all introduced.

It is, in short, a singularly striking foreshadowing of the coming kingdom.

“The Lord will give grace and glory.” We have already seen, in what we have travelled over of this book, very much of the actings of **“grace;”** and here we have, from the pencil of the Holy Ghost, a beautiful picture of **“glory,”** - a picture which must be regarded as peculiarly important, as exhibiting the varied fields in which that glory shall be manifested.

“The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God” are scriptural distinctions which can never be overlooked without marring that perfect range of truth which God has revealed in His holy Word. They have existed ever since the mystery of the Church was fully developed by the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and they shall exist throughout the millennial age. Hence, every spiritual student of Scripture will give them their due place in his mind.

The Apostle expressly teaches us, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that the mystery of the Church had not been made known, in other ages, to the sons of men, as it was revealed to him. But, though not directly revealed, it had been shadowed forth in one way or another; as, for example, in Joseph’s marriage with an Egyptian, and in Moses’ marriage with an Ethiopian. The type or shadow of a truth is a very different thing from a direct and positive revelation of it. The great mystery of the Church was not revealed until Christ, in heavenly glory, revealed it to Saul of Tarsus. Hence, all who look for the full unfolding of this mystery in the Law, the Prophets, or the Psalms, will find themselves engaged in unintelligent labour. When, however, they find it distinctly revealed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, they will be able, with interest and profit, to trace its foreshadowing in Old Testament Scripture.

Thus we have, in the opening of our chapter, a millennial scene.

All the fields of glory lie open in vision before us. **“The Jew”** stands forth as the great earthly witness of the Lord’s faithfulness, His mercy, and His power. This is what the Jew has been in bygone ages, it is what he is now, and what he will be, world without end. **“The Gentile”** reads, in the book of God’s dealings with the Jew, his deepest lessons. He traces the marvellous history of that peculiar and elect people - **“a people terrible from their beginning hitherto.”**

He sees thrones and empires overturned - nations shaken to their center - every one and everything compelled to give way, in order to establish the supremacy of that people on whom the Lord has set His love. **“Now I know,”** he says, **“that the Lord is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them”** (Ver. 11). Such is the confession of **“the Gentile,”** when the wondrous page of Jewish history lies open before him. - “the Church of God collectively, as prefigured by Zipporah, and the members thereof individually, as seen in Zipporah’s sons, are presented as occupying the most intimate relationship with the deliverer.

All this is perfect in its way. We may be asked for our proofs. The answer is, **“I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say.”**

We can never build a doctrine upon a type; but when a doctrine is revealed a type thereof may be discerned with accuracy and studied with profit. In every case, a spiritual mind is essentially necessary, either to understand the doctrine or discern the type. **“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (I Corinthians 2:14).

From verse 13 to the end of our chapter, we have the appointment of rulers, who were to assist Moses in the management of the affairs of the congregation. This was the suggestion of Jethro, who feared that Moses would **“wear away”** in consequence of his labours. In connection with this, it may be profitable to look at the appointment of the seventy elders in Numbers 11. Here we find the spirit of Moses crushed beneath the ponderous responsibility which devolved upon him, and he gives utterance to the anguish of his heart in the following accents.

“And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them that thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness” (Numbers 11:11-15),

In all this we see Moses evidently retiring from a post of honour. If God were pleased to make him the sole instrument in managing the assembly, it was only so much the more dignity and privilege conferred upon him. True, the responsibility was immense; but faith would own that God was amply sufficient for that. Here, however, the heart of Moses failed him (blessed servant as he was), and he says, **“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.”**

But he was not asked to bear them alone; for God was with him. They were not too heavy for God. It was He that was bearing them; Moses was but the instrument. He might just as well have spoken of his rod as bearing the people; for what was he but a mere instrument in God’s hand, as the rod was in his? It is here the servants of Christ constantly fail; and the failure is all the more dangerous because it wears the appearance of humility.

It seems like distrust of ones self and deep lowliness of spirit, to shrink from heavy responsibility; but all we need to inquire is, has God imposed that responsibility? If so, He will assuredly be with me in sustaining it; and having Him with me, I can sustain anything. With Him, the weight of a mountain is nothing; without Him, the weight of a feather is overwhelming. It is a totally different thing if a man, in the vanity of his mind, thrust himself forward and take a burden upon his shoulder which God never intended him to bear, and, therefore, never fitted him to bear it; we may then, surely, expect to see him crushed beneath the weight; but if God lays it upon him, He will qualify and strengthen him to carry it.

It is never the fruit of humility to depart from a divinely-appointed post. On the contrary, the deepest humility will express itself by remaining there in simple dependence upon God. It is a sure evidence of being occupied about self when we shrink from service on the ground of inability. God does not call us unto service on the ground of our ability, but of His own; hence, unless I am filled with thoughts about myself, or with positive distrust of Him, I need not relinquish any position of service or testimony because of the heavy responsibilities attaching thereto. All power belongs to God, and it is quite the same whether that power acts through one agent or through seventy; the power is still the same: but if one agent refuse the dignity, it is only so much the worse for him. God will not force people to abide in a place of honour, if they cannot trust Him to sustain them there. The way lies always open to them to step down from their dignity, and sink into the place where base unbelief is sure to put us.

Thus it was with Moses. He complained of the burden, and the burden was speedily removed; but with it the high honour of being allowed to carry it.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there; and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone” (Numbers 11:16, 17).

There was no fresh power introduced. It was the same Spirit, whether in one or in seventy. There was no more value or virtue in the flesh of seventy men than in the flesh of one man. **“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”** (John 6:63).

There was nothing, in the way of power, gained; but a great deal, in the way of dignity, lost by this movement on the part of Moses.

In the after part of Numbers 11 we find Moses giving utterance to accents of unbelief, which called forth from the Lord a sharp rebuke. **“Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.”**

If my reader will compare Numbers 11-15 with Numbers 21, 22, he will see a marked and solemn connection. The man who shrinks from responsibility, on the ground of his own feebleness, is in great danger of calling in question the fullness and sufficiency of God’s resources.

This entire scene teaches a most valuable lesson to every servant of Christ who may be tempted to feel himself alone or overburdened in his work. Let such an one bear in mind that, where the Holy Ghost is working, one instrument is as good and as efficient as seventy; and where He is not working seventy are of no more value than one. It all depends upon the energy of the Holy Ghost. With Him, one man can do all, endure all, sustain all. Without Him, seventy men can do nothing.

Let the lonely servant remember, for the comfort and encouragement of his sinking heart, that, provided he has the presence and power of the Holy Ghost with him, he need not complain of his burden, nor sigh for a division of labour. If God honour a man by giving him a great deal of work to do, let him rejoice therein and not murmur; for if he murmur, he can very speedily lose his honour. God is at no loss for instruments. He could, from the stones, raise up children unto Abraham; and He can raise up, from the same, the needed agents to carry on His glorious work.

Oh! For a heart to serve Him! A patient, humble, self-emptied, devoted heart! A heart ready to serve in company, ready to serve alone, a heart so filled with love to Christ that it will find its joy - its chief joy - in serving Him, let the sphere or character of service be what it may. This assuredly is the special need of the day in which our lot is cast. May the Holy Ghost stir up our hearts to a deeper sense of the exceeding preciousness of the name of Jesus, and enable us to yield a fuller, clearer, more unequivocal response to the changeless love of His heart!

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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