

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE book of Genesis is, for the most part, taken up with the history of seven men, namely, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. There is, I doubt not, a specific line of truth brought out in connection with each of those men. Thus, for example,

In Abel we have the great foundation truth of man's coming to God, in the way of atonement,- atonement apprehends by faith.

In Enoch, we have the proper portion and hope of the heavenly family; while Noah presents to us the destiny of the earthly family. Enoch was taken to Heaven before the judgment came; Noah was carried through the judgment into a restored earth. Thus, in each, we have a distinct character of truth, and, as a consequence, a distinct phase of faith.

My reader can pursue the subject fully, in connection with the eleventh of Hebrews; and I feel assured he will find much interest and profit, in so doing.

We shall now proceed with our immediate theme, namely, the call of Abraham.

By comparing Chapter 12:1, Chapter 11:31, with Acts 7:2-4, we learn a truth of immense practical value to the soul.

“The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.” (Chapter 12:1).

Such was the communication made to Abraham,- a communication of the most definite character, designed of God to act upon Abraham's heart and conscience.

“The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into a land that I will show thee. Then went he forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran, (or Haran) and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell.” (Acts 7:2-4).

The result of this communication is given in Chapter 11:31:

“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot. the son of Haran, his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter-in-Law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan: and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there . . . and Terah died in Haran.”

From all these passages taken together, we learn that the ties of nature hindered the full response of Abraham’s soul to the call of God. Though called to Canaan, he, nevertheless, tarried at Haran, till nature’s tie was snapped by death, and then, with unimpeded step, he made his way to the place to which **“the God of glory”** had called him.

This is full of meaning.

The influences of nature are ever hostile to the full realization and practical power of **“the calling of God.”**

We are sadly prone to take lower ground than that which the divine call would set before us. It needs great simplicity and integrity of faith to enable the soul to rise to the height of God’s thoughts, and to make our own of that which he reveals.

The apostle’s prayer (Ephesians 1:15-22) demonstrates how fully he, by the Holy Ghost, entered into the difficulty with which the Church would ever have to contend, in seeking to apprehend **“the hope of God’s calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;”** because, evidently, if we fail to apprehend the calling, we cannot **“walk worthy”** thereof.

I must know where I am called to go, before I can go thither.

Had Abraham’s soul been fully under the power of the truth that **“God’s calling”** was to Canaan, and that there, too, lay **“his inheritance,”** he could not have remained in Charran. And so with us. If we are led by the Holy Ghost into the understanding of the truth, that we are called with a heavenly calling; that our home, our portion, our hope, our inheritance, are all above **“where Christ sitteth at God’s right hand,”** we could never be satisfied to maintain a standing, seek a name, or lay up an inheritance, on the earth.

The two things are incompatible: this is the true way to look at the matter. The heavenly calling is not an empty dogma, a powerless theory, nor a crude speculation. It is either a divine reality, or it is absolutely nothing.

Was Abraham’s call to Canaan a speculation?

Was it a mere theory about which he might talk or argue, while, at the same time, he continued in Charran? Assuredly not. It was a truth, a divine truth, a powerfully practical truth.

He was called to Canaan, and God could not possibly sanction his stopping short thereof.

Thus it was with Abraham, and thus it is with us.

If we would enjoy the divine sanction and the divine presence, we must be seeking by faith to act upon the divine call. That is to say, we must seek to reach, in experience, in practice, and moral character, the point to which God has called us, and that point is full fellowship with his own Son,- fellowship with him in his rejection below, fellowship with him in his acceptance above. But, as in Abraham's case, it was death that broke the link by which nature bound him to Charran; so, in our case, it is death which breaks the link by which nature ties us down to this present world.

We must realize the truth that we have died in Christ, our Head and Representative,- that our place in nature and in the world is amongst the things that were,- that the Cross of Christ is to us what the Red Sea was to Israel, namely that which separates us forever from the land of death and judgment. thus only shall we be able to walk, in any measure, **“worthy of the calling wherewith we are called,”**- our high, our holy, our heavenly calling, our **“calling of God in Christ Jesus.”**

And here I would dwell for a little on the Cross of Christ in its two grand, fundamental phases, or in other words, the Cross as the basis of our worship and our discipleship, our peace and our testimony, our relation with God, and our relation with the world.

If as a convicted sinner, I look at the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, I behold in it the everlasting foundation of my peace.

- I see my **“sin”** put away, as to the root or principle thereof, and I see my **“sins”** borne.
- I see God to be, in very deed, **“for me,”** and that, moreover, in the very condition in which my convicted conscience tells me I am.

The Cross unfolds God as the sinner's Friend.

It reveals Him in that most wondrous character as the righteous Justifier of the most ungodly sinner. Creation never could do this. Providence never could do this. Therein I may see God's power, his majesty, and his wisdom: but what if all these things should be ranged against me? Looked at in themselves abstractedly, they would be so, for I am a sinner; and power, majesty, and wisdom, could not put away my sin, nor justify God in receiving me.

The introduction of the Cross, however, changes the aspect of things entirely.

- There I find God dealing with sin in such a manner as to glorify himself infinitely.
- There I see the magnificent display and perfect harmony of all the divine attributes.
- There I see love, and such love as captivates and assures my heart, and weans it in proportion as I realize it, from every other object.
- There I see wisdom, and such wisdom as baffles devils and astonishes angels.
- There I see power, and such power as bears down all opposition.
- There I see holiness, and such holiness as repulses sin to the very farthest point of the moral universe, and gives the most intense expression of God's abhorrence thereof, that could possibly be given.

- There I see grace, and such grace as sets the sinner in the very presence of God,- yea, puts him into his bosom.

Where could I see all these things but in the Cross? Nowhere else.

Look where you please, and you cannot find aught that so blessedly combines those two great points, namely, “**glory to God in the highest,**” and “**on earth peace.**”

How precious, therefore, is the Cross, in this its first phase, as the basis of the sinner’s peace, the basis of his worship, and the basis of his eternal relationship with the God who is there so blessedly and so gloriously revealed!

How precious to God, as furnishing him with a righteous ground on which to go in the full display at all his matchless perfections, and in his most gracious dealings with the sinner!

So precious is it to God that, as a recent writer has well remarked, “All that He has said,- all that He has done, from the very beginning, indicates that it was ever uppermost in his heart. And no wonder! His dear and well-beloved Son was to hang there, between Heaven and earth, the object of all the shame and suffering that men and devils could heap upon Him, because he loved to do His Father’s will, and redeem the children of His grace. It will be the grand centre of attraction, as the fullest expression of his love, throughout eternity.”

Then, as the basis of our practical discipleship and testimony, the Cross demands our most profound consideration.

In this aspect of it, I need hardly say, it is as perfect as in the former.

The same Cross which connects me with God has separated me from the world. A dead man is evidently done with the world; and since the believer, having died in Christ, is done with the world; and, having risen with Christ, is connected with God, in the power of a new life, a new nature.

Being thus inseparably linked with Christ, he of necessity participates in his acceptance with God, and in his rejection by the world. The two things go together. The former makes him a worshipper and a citizen in Heaven, the latter makes him a witness and a stranger on earth. That brings him inside the veil; this puts him outside the camp. The one is as perfect as the other.

If the Cross has come between me and my sins, it has just as really come between me and the world. In the former case, it puts me into the place of peace with God; in the latter, it puts me into the place of hostility with the world, that is, in a moral point of view; though in another sense it makes me the patient, humble witness of that precious, unfathomable, eternal grace which is set forth in the Cross.

Now, the believer should clearly understand, and rightly distinguish between, both the above phases of the Cross of Christ. He should not profess to enjoy the one, while he refuses to enter into the other.

If his ear is open to hear Christ's voice within the veil, it should be open also to hear his voice outside the camp. If he enters into the atonement which the Cross has accomplished, he should also realize the rejection which it necessarily involves. The former flows out of the part which God had in the Cross; the latter out of the part which man had therein. It is our happy privilege not only to be done with our sins, but to be done with the world also.

All this is involved in the doctrine of the Cross.

Well, therefore, might the apostle say: **"God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."**

Paul looked upon the world as a thing which ought to be nailed to the Cross; and the world, in having crucified Christ, had crucified all who belonged to him. Hence there is a double crucifixion, as regards the believer and the world; and were this fully entered into, it would prove the utter impossibility of ever amalgamating the two.

Beloved reader, let us deeply, honestly, and prayerfully ponder these things; and may the Holy Ghost give us the ability to enter into the full practical power of both the phases of the Cross of Christ.

We shall now return to our theme.

We are not told how long Abraham tarried at Haran; yet God graciously waited on his servant until, freed from nature's clog, he could fully obey his command.

There was, however, no accommodation of that command to the circumstances of nature. This would never do. God loves his servants too well to deprive them of the full blessedness of entire obedience. There was no fresh revelation to Abraham's soul during the time of his sojourn in Haran.

It is well to see this.

We must act up to the light already communicated, and then God will give us more.

"To him that hath shall more be given." This is God's principle. Still we must remember that God will never drag us along the path of true-hearted discipleship. This would greatly lack the moral excellency which characterizes all the ways of God. He does not drag but draw us along the path which leads to ineffable blessedness in himself; and if we do not see that it is for our real advantage to break through all the barriers of nature, in order to respond to God's call, we forsake our own mercies. But alas! Our hearts little enter into this.

We begin to calculate about the sacrifices, the hindrances, and the difficulties, instead of bounding along the path, in eagerness of soul, as knowing and loving the One whose call has sounded in our ears.

There is much true blessing to the soul in every step of obedience, for obedience is the fruit of faith; and faith puts us into living association and communion with God himself.

Looking at obedience in this light, we can easily see how distinctly it is marked off, in every feature of it from legality.

This latter sets a man with the entire burden of his sins on him to serve God by keeping the law; hence the soul is kept in constant torture, and so far from running in the path of obedience, it has not even taken the very first step.

True obedience, on the contrary, is simply the manifestation or outflow of a new nature communicated in grace.

To this new nature God graciously impacts precepts for its guidance; and it is perfectly certain that the divine nature guided by the divine precept can never by any possibility resolve itself into legality.

What constitutes legality is the old nature taking up God's precepts and essaying to carry them out.

To attempt to regulate man's fallen nature by God's pure and holy law, is as useless and absurd as anything can be. How could fallen nature breathe an atmosphere so pure? Impossible. Both the atmosphere and the nature must be divine.

But not only does the blessed God impart a divine nature to the believer, and guide that nature by His heavenly precepts, He also sets before it suited hopes and expectations.

Thus, in Abraham's case, "**The God of glory appeared unto him.**" And for what purpose? To set before his soul's vision an attractive object, - "**a land that I will show thee.**"

This was not compulsion but attraction.

God's land was in the judgment of the new nature,- the judgment of faith, far better than Ur or Charran: and albeit he had not seen the land, yet, inasmuch as it was God's land, faith judged it to be worth having, and not only worth having, but also fully worth the surrender of present things.

Hence we read, "**By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.**" That is to say, "**he walked by faith, not by sight.**"

Though he had not seen with his eyes, he believed with his heart, and faith became the great moving spring in his soul.

Faith rests on a far more solid ground than the evidence of our senses, and that is the Word of God. Our senses may deceive us, but God's word never can.

Now, the entire truth of the divine nature, together with the precepts which guide and the hopes which animate it, the whole of the divine doctrine respecting these things is completely thrown overboard by the system of legalism.

The legalist teaches that we must surrender earth in order to get Heaven. But how can fallen nature surrender that to which it is allied? How can it be attracted by that in which it sees no charms?

Heaven has no charms for nature; yea, it is the very last place it would like to be found in. Nature has no taste for Heaven, its occupations, or its occupants.

Were it possible for nature to find itself there, it would be miserable. Thus, then, nature has no ability to surrender earth, and no desire to get Heaven. True, it would be glad to escape hell and its ineffable torment, gloom, and misery. But the desire to escape hell, and the desire to get Heaven, spring from two very different sources. The former may exist in the old nature; the latter can only be found in the new.

Were there no **“lake of fire,”** and no **“worm”** in hell, nature would not so shrink from it. The same principle holds good in reference to all of nature’s pursuits and desires.

The legalist. teaches that we must give up sin before we can get righteousness. But, nature cannot give up sin; and as to righteousness, it absolutely hates it. True, it would like a certain amount of religion; but it is only with the idea that religion will preserve it from hell fire. It does not love religion because of its introducing the soul to the present enjoyment of God and his ways.

How different from all this miserable system of legalism, in every phase thereof, is **“the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God.”**

This Gospel reveals God himself coming down in perfect grace, and putting away sin by the sacrifice of the Cross; putting it away, in the most absolute manner, on the ground of eternal righteousness, inasmuch as Christ suffered for it, having been made sin for us. And not only is God seen putting away sin, but also imparting a new life, even the risen life of his own risen, exalted, and glorified Son, which life every true believer possesses, in virtue of being linked, in God’s eternal counsels, with him who was nailed to the Cross, but is now on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

This nature, as we have remarked, He graciously guides by the precepts of His holy word, applied in power by the Holy Ghost. He also animates it by the presentation of indestructible hopes. He reveals, in the distance, **“the hope of glory” - “a city which hath foundations” - “a better country, that is an heavenly”** - the **“many mansions”** of the Father’s house, on high - **“golden harps” - “green palms,”** and **“white robes” - “a kingdom which cannot be moved”** - everlasting association with himself, in those regions of bliss and light, where sorrow and darkness can never enter - the unspeakable privilege of being led, throughout the countless ages of eternity, **“beside the still waters, and through the green pastures”** of redeeming love.

How different is all this from the legalist's notion!

Instead of calling upon me to educate and manage, by the dogmas of systematic religion, an irremediably corrupt nature, in order that thereby I may surrender an earth that I love, and attain to a Heaven which I hate, He, in infinite grace, and on the ground of Christ's accomplished sacrifice, bestows upon me a nature which can enjoy Heaven, and a Heaven for that nature to enjoy; and, not only a Heaven, but himself the unfailing spring of all Heaven's joy.

Such is God's most excellent way.

- Thus He dealt with Abraham.
- Thus he dealt with Saul of Tarsus.
- Thus he deals with us.

The God of glory showed Abraham a better country than Ur or Charran. He showed Saul of Tarsus a glory so bright, that it closed his eyes to all earth's brightest glories, and caused him to count them all **"but dung,"** that he might win that blessed One who had appeared to him, and whose voice had spoken to his inmost soul. He saw a heavenly Christ in glory; and, throughout the remainder of his worse, notwithstanding the weakness of the earthen vessel, that heavenly Christ and that heavenly glory engrossed his whole soul.

"And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land."

The presence of the Canaanite in God's land would, necessarily, prove a trial to Abraham. It would be a demand upon his faith and hope, an exercise of heart, a trial of patience.

He had left Ur and Charran behind, and come into the country of which **"the God of glory"** had spoken to him, and there he finds **"the Canaanite."** But there, too, he finds the Lord.

"And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land."

The connection between the two statements is beautiful and touching.

"The Canaanite was then in the land," and lest Abraham's eye should rest upon the Canaanite, the present possessor of the land, the Lord appears to him as the One who was going to give the land to him and to his seed forever. Thus Abraham was taken up with the Lord, and not with the Canaanite.

This is full of instruction for us.

The Canaanite in the land is the expression of the power of Satan; but, instead of being occupied with Satan's power to keep us out of the inheritance, we are called to apprehend Christ's power to bring us in.

“We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.”

The very sphere into which we are called is the sphere of our conflict.

Should this terrify us? By no means.

We have Christ there,- a victorious Christ, in whom we are **“more than conquerors.”** Hence, instead of indulging **“a spirit of fear,”** we cultivate a spirit of worship.

“And there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.” “And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent.”

The altar and the tent give us the two great features of Abraham’s character. A worshipper of God, a stranger in the world,- most blessed characteristics!

Having nothing on earth, - having our all in God.

Abraham had **“not so much as to set his foot upon;”** but he had God to enjoy, and that was enough.

However, faith has its trials, as well as its answers.

It is not to be imagined that the man of faith, having pushed out from the shore of circumstances, finds it all smooth and easy sailing. By no means. Again and again he is called to encounter rough seas and stormy skies; but it is all graciously designed to lead him into deeper and more matured experience of what God is to the heart that confides in Him.

Were the sky always without a cloud and the ocean without a ripple, the believer would not know so well the God with whom he has to do; for, alas! We know how prone the heart is to mistake the peace of circumstances for the peace of God.

When everything is going on smoothly and pleasantly, our property safe, our business prosperous, our children and servants carrying themselves agreeably, our residence comfortable, our health excellent, everything, in short, just to our mind, how apt we are to mistake the peace which reposes upon such circumstances for that peace which flows from the realized presence of Christ.

The Lord knows this; and, therefore, he comes in, in one way or another, and stirs up the nest, that is, if we are found nestling in circumstances, instead of in himself.

But, again, we are frequently led to judge of the rightness of a path by its exemption from trial, and *vice versa*. This is a great mistake. The path of obedience may often be found most trying to flesh and blood.

Thus, in Abraham’s case, he was not only called to encounter the Canaanite, in the place to which God had called him, but there was also **“a famine in the land.”**

Should he, therefore, have concluded that he was not in his right place? Assuredly not. That would have been to judge according to the sight of his eyes, the very thing which faith never does.

No doubt it was a deep trial to the heart, an inexplicable puzzle to nature; but to faith it was all plain and easy.

When Paul was called into Macedonia, almost the first thing he had to encounter was the prison at Philippi. this, to a heart out of communion, would have seemed a death-blow to the entire mission. But Paul never questioned the rightness of his position. He was enabled to “**sing praises**” in the midst of it all, assured that everything was just as it should be: and so it was; for in the prison of Philippi was one of God’s vessels of mercy. who could not, humanly speaking, have heard the Gospel, had not the preachers of it been thrust into the very place where he was.

The devil was made, in spite of himself, the instrument of sending the Gospel to the ears of one of God’s elect.

Now, Abraham. should have reasoned in the same way, in reference to the famine.

He was in the very place in which God had set him; and, evidently, he received no direction to leave it.

True, the famine was there; and, moreover, Egypt was at hand, offering deliverance from pressure; still the path of God’s servant was plain.

- It is better to suffer in Canaan, if it should be so, than life in luxury in Egypt.
- It is better far to suffer in God’s path, then be at ease in Satan’s.
- It is better to be poor with Christ, than rich without him.

“Abraham had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and men servants, and maid servants, and she asses, and camels.”

Substantial proofs, the natural heart would doubtless, say, of the rightness of his step, in going down to Egypt. But, ah! He had no altar, - no communion.

Egypt was not the place of God’s presence.

He lost more than he gained by going thither.

This is ever the case. Nothing can ever make up for the loss of communion with God.

Exemption from temporary pressure, and the accession of the greatest wealth are but poor equivalents for what one loses by diverging a hair’s breadth from the straight path of obedience. How many of us can add our amen to this!

How many, in order to avoid the trial and exercise connected with God's path, have slipped aside into the current of this present. evil world, and thereby brought leanness and barrenness, heaviness and gloom, into their souls!

It may be they have, to use the common phrase, "made money," increased their store, obtained the world's favor, been "**entreated well**" by its Pharaohs, gotten a name and a position amongst men; but are these a proper equivalent for joy in God, communion, liberty of heart, a pure, uncondemning conscience, a thankful, worshipping spirit, vigorous testimony, and effectual service?

Alas, for the man that can think so!

And yet all the above incomparable blessings have been often sold for a little ease, a little influence, a little money.

Christian reader, let us watch against the tendency to step aside from the narrow, yet safe, the sometimes rough, yet always pleasant, path of simple, wholehearted obedience.

Let us keep guard - jealous, careful guard - over "**faith and a pure conscience**," for which nothing can compensate.

Should trial come, let us, instead of turning aside into Egypt, wait on God; and thus the trial, instead of proving an occasion of stumbling, will prove an opportunity for obedience.

Let us, when tempted to slip into the course of the world, remember him "**who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God, and our Father**" (Galatians 1:4).

If such was his love for us, and such his sense of the true character of this present world, that he gave himself, in order to deliver us from it, shall we deny him by plunging again into that from which his Cross has forever delivered us?

May God Almighty forbid!

May he keep us in the hollow of his hand, and under the shadow of his wings. until we see Jesus as he is, and be like Him, and with Him forever.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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