

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THIS brief chapter forms an inspired postscript to the book of Deuteronomy. We are not told who was employed as the instrument in the hand of the inspiring Spirit, but this is a matter of no moment to the devout student of Holy Scripture. We are fully persuaded that the postscript is as truly inspired as the book, and the book as the Pentateuch, and the Pentateuch as the whole volume of God.

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, ‘This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed; I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.’ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”

In our studies on the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, we have had occasion to dwell upon the very solemn and, we may truly add, soul-subduing fact recorded in the above quotation. It will not therefore be needful to add many words in this our closing section. We would merely remind the reader that if he would have a full understanding of the whole subject, he must look at Moses in a twofold aspect, namely, officially and personally.

Now, looking at this beloved and honored man in his official capacity, it is very plain that it lay not in his province to conduct the congregation of Israel into the Promised Land. The wilderness was his sphere of action; it pertained not to him to lead the people across the river of death into their destined inheritance, His ministry was connected with man’s responsibility under law and the government of God, and hence it never could lead the people into the enjoyment of the promise: it was reserved for his successor to do this.

Joshua, a type of the risen Saviour, was God’s appointed instrument to lead His people across the Jordan, and plant them in their divinely given inheritance. All this is plain, and deeply interesting; but we must look at Moses personally, as well as officially; and here too we must view him in a twofold aspect – as the subject of government, and the object of grace.

We must never lose sight of this most important distinction: it runs all through Scripture, and is strikingly illustrated in the history of many of the Lord's beloved people and of His most eminent servants.

The subject of grace and government demands the reader's most profound attention. We have dwelt upon it again and again in the course of our studies, but no words of ours could adequately set forth its moral importance and immense practical value. We consider it one of the weightiest and most seasonable subjects that could possibly engage the attention of the Lord's people at the present moment.

It was the government of God which, with stern decision, forbade the entrance of Moses into the Promised Land, much as he longed to do so. He spoke unadvisedly with his lips – he failed to glorify God in the eyes of the congregation at the waters of Meribah, and for this he was forbidden to cross the Jordan and plant his foot on the promised land.

Let us deeply ponder this, beloved Christian reader.

Let us see that we fully apprehend its moral force and practical application.

It is surely with the greatest tenderness and delicacy that we would refer, to the failure of one of the most beloved and illustrious of the Lord's servants, but it has been recorded for our learning and solemn admonition, and therefore we are bound to give earnest heed to it. We should ever remember that we too, though under grace, are also the subjects of divine government. We are here on this earth, in the place of solemn responsibility, under a government which cannot be trifled with.

True, we are children of the Father, loved with an infinite and everlasting love – loved even as Jesus is loved; we are members of the body of Christ, loved, cherished, and nourished according to all the perfect love of His heart. There is no question of responsibility here, no possibility of failure; all is divinely settled, divinely sure: but we are the subjects of divine government also. Let us never for a moment lose sight of this. Let us beware of one-sided and pernicious notions of grace.

The very fact of our being objects of divine favor and love, children of God, members of Christ, should lead us to yield all the more reverent attention to the divine government.

To use an illustration drawn from human affairs, her majesty's children should, above all others, just because they are her children, respect her government; and were they in any way to transgress her laws, the dignity of government would be strikingly illustrated by their being made to pay the penalty.

If they, because of being the queen's children, were to be allowed to transgress with impunity the enactments of her majesty's government, it would be simply exposing the government to public contempt, and affording a warrant to all her subjects to do the same. And if it be thus in the case of a human government, how much more in the government of God!

- **“You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.”**

- **“The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”**

Solemn fact I solemn inquiry! May we ponder them deeply.

But, as we have said, Moses was the subject of grace, as well as of government; and truly that grace shines with special luster on the top of Pisgah. There the venerable servant of God was permitted to stand in his Master’s presence, and; with undimmed eye, survey the land of promise, in all its fair proportions. He was permitted to see it from a divine stand-point – see it, not merely as possessed by Israel, but as given by God.

And what then? He fell asleep and was gathered to his people. He died, not as a withered and feeble old man, but in all the freshness and vigor of matured manhood.

“And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.”

Striking testimony! Rare fact in the annals of our fallen race!

The life of Moses was divided into three important and strongly marked periods of forty years each. He spent:

- forty years in the house of Pharaoh,
- forty years **“at the backside of the desert,”** and
- forty years in the wilderness.

Marvelous life! Eventful history! How instructive! how suggestive! how rich in its lessons from first to last!

How profoundly interesting the study of such a life! – to trace him from the river’s brink, where he lay a helpless babe, up to the top of Pisgah, where he stood, in company with his Lord, to gaze with undimmed vision upon the fair inheritance of the Israel of God; and to see him again on the Mount of Transfiguration, in company with his honored fellow-servant Elias, **“talking with Jesus”** on the grandest theme that could possibly engage the attention of men or angels. Highly favored man! Blessed servant! Marvelous vessel!

And then let us hearken to the divine testimony to this most beloved man of God.

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel.”

May the Lord, in His infinite goodness, bless our study of the book of Deuteronomy.

May its precious lessons be engraved upon the tablets of our hearts with the eternal pen of the Holy Ghost, and produce their proper result in forming our character, governing our conduct, and shaping our way through this world.

May we earnestly seek to tread, with a humble spirit and firm step, the narrow path of obedience, till traveling days are done.

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