

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

by

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## Exodus 21-23

The study of this section of our book is eminently calculated to impress the heart with a sense of God's unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness. It enables one to form some idea of the character of a kingdom governed by laws of divine appointment. Here, too, we may see the amazing condescension of Him who, though He is the great God of Heaven and earth, can, nevertheless, stoop to adjudicate between man and man in reference to the death of an ox, the loan of a garment, or the loss of a servant's tooth.

**“Who is like unto the Lord our God, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and on earth?”**

- He governs the universe, and yet He can occupy Himself with the provision of a covering for one of His creatures.
- He guides the angel's flight and takes notice of a crawling worm.
- He humbles Himself to regulate the movements of those countless orbs that roll through infinite space and to record the fall of a sparrow.

As to the character of the judgment set forth in the chapters before us, we may learn a double lesson. These judgments and ordinances bear a twofold witness:

- they convey to the ear a twofold message, and
- they present to the eye two sides of a picture.

They tell of God and they tell of man.

*In the first place, on God's part, we find Him enacting laws which exhibit strict, even-handed, perfect justice.*

**“Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”** Such was the character of the laws, the statutes, and the judgments by which God governed His earthly kingdom of Israel. Everything was provided for, every interest was maintained, and every claim was met.

There was no partiality - no distinction made between the rich and the poor. The balance in which each man's claim was weighed was adjusted with divine accuracy, so that no one could justly complain of a decision. The pure robe of justice was not to be tarnished with the foul stains of bribery, corruption and partiality. The eye and the hand of a divine Legislator provided for everything; and a divine Executive inflexibly dealt with every defaulter. The stroke of justice fell only on the head of the guilty, while every obedient soul was protected in the enjoyment of all his rights and privileges.

*Then, as regards man, it is impossible to read over these laws and not be struck with the disclosure which they indirectly, but really, make of his desperate depravity.*

The fact of the Lord's having to enact laws against certain crimes, proves the capability, on man's part, of committing those crimes. Were the capability and the tendency not there, there would be no need of the enactments. Now, there are many who, if the gross abominations forbidden in these chapters were named to them, might feel disposed to adopt the language of Hazael and say, "**Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?**" Such persons have not yet travelled down into the deep abyss of their own hearts. For albeit there are crimes here forbidden which would seem to place man, as regards his habits and tendencies, below the level of a "dog," yet do those very statutes prove, beyond all question, that the most refined and cultivated member of the human family carries above, in his bosom, the seeds of the very darkest and most horrifying abominations.

For whom were those statutes enacted? For man. Were they needful? Unquestionably. But they would have been quite superfluous if man were incapable of committing the sins referred to. But man is capable; and hence we see that man is sunk to the very lowest possible level - that his nature is wholly corrupt - that, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, there is not so much as a speck of moral soundness.

- How can such a being ever stand, without an emotion of fear, in the full blaze of the throne of God?
- How can he stand within the holiest?
- How can he stand on the sea of glass?
- How can he enter in by the pearly gates and tread the golden streets?

The reply to these inquiries unfolds the amazing depths of redeeming love and the eternal efficacy of the Blood of the Lamb.

- Deep as is man's ruin, the love of God is deeper still.
- Black as is his guilt, the Blood of Jesus can wash it all away.
- Wide as is the chasm separating man from God, the Cross has bridged it.

God has come down to the very lowest point of the sinner's condition, in order that He might lift him up into a position of infinite favour, in eternal association with His own Son. Well may we exclaim, "**Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God**" (I John 3: 1).

Nothing could fathom man's ruin but God's love, and nothing could equal man's guilt but the Blood of Christ. But now the very depth of the ruin only magnifies the love that has fathomed it, and the intensity of the guilt only celebrates the efficacy of the Blood that can cleanse it. The very vilest sinner who believes in Jesus can rejoice in the assurance that God sees him and pronounces him "**clean every whit.**"

Such, then, is the double character of instruction to be gleaned from the laws and ordinances in this section, looked at as a whole; and the more minutely we look at them, in detail, the more impressed we shall be with a sense of their fullness and beauty.

*Take, for instance, the very first ordinance that presents itself, namely, that of the Hebrew Servant.*

**"Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him unto the judges: he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever"** (Exodus 21:1-6).

The servant was perfectly free to go out, so far as he was personally concerned. He had discharged every claim, and could, therefore, walk abroad in unquestioned freedom; but because of his love to his master, his wife, and his children, he voluntarily bound himself to perpetual servitude; and not only so, but he was also willing to bear, in his own person, the marks of that servitude.

The application of this to the Lord Jesus Christ will be obvious to the intelligent reader.

In Him we behold the One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father before all worlds - the object of His eternal delight - who might have occupied, throughout eternity, this His personal and entirely peculiar place, inasmuch as there lay upon Him no obligation (save that which ineffable love created and ineffable love incurred) to abandon that place. Such, however, was His love to the Father whose counsels were involved, and for the Church collectively, and each individual member thereof, whose salvation was involved, that He, voluntarily, came down to earth, emptied Himself, and made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant and the marks of perpetual service.

To these marks we probably have a striking allusion in the Psalms. "**Mine ears hast thou digged**" (Psalm 40:6, marg). This Psalm is the expression of Christ's devotedness to God. "**Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea thy law is within my heart.**"

He came to do the will of God, whatever that will might be. He never once did His own will, not even in the reception and salvation of sinners, though surely His loving heart, with all its affections, was most fully in that glorious work. Still He receives and saves only as the servant of the Father's counsels. **"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day"** (John 6:37-39).

*Here we have a most interesting view of the servant character of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

He, in perfect grace, holds Himself responsible to receive all who come within the range of the divine counsels; and not only to receive them, but to preserve them through all the difficulties and trials of their devious path down here, yea, in the article of death itself, should it come, and to raise them all up in the last day. Oh! how secure is the very feeblest member of the Church of God! He is the subject of God's eternal counsels, which counsels the Lord Jesus Christ is pledged to carry out. Jesus loves the Father, and, in proportion to the intensity of that love, is the security of each member of the redeemed family. The salvation of any sinner who believes on the name of the Son of God is, in one aspect of it, but the expression of Christ's love to the Father. If one such could perish, through any cause whatsoever, it would argue that the Lord Jesus Christ was unable to carry out the will of God, which were nothing short of positive blasphemy against His sacred name, to whom be all honour and majesty throughout the everlasting ages.

*Thus we have, in the Hebrew servant, a type of Christ in His pure devotedness to the Father.*

But there is more than this: **"I love my wife and my children."** **"Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

There are various other passages of Scripture presenting Christ as the antitype of the Hebrew servant, both in His love for the Church, as a body, and for all believers personally. In Matthew 13, John 10 and 13, and Hebrews 2, my reader will find special teaching on the point.

The apprehension of this love of the heart of Jesus cannot fail to produce a spirit of fervent devotedness to the One who could exhibit such pure, such perfect, such disinterested love. How could the wife and children of the Hebrew servant fail to love one who had voluntarily surrendered his liberty in order that he and they might be together? And what is the love presented in the type, when compared with that which shines in the antitype? It is as nothing.

**"The love of Christ passeth knowledge."** It led Him to think of us before all worlds - to visit us in the fullness of time - to walk deliberately to the door post - to suffer for us on the Cross, in order that He might raise us to companionship with himself, in His everlasting kingdom and glory.

Were I to enter into a full exposition of the remaining statutes and judgments of this portion of the Book of Exodus, it would carry me much further than I feel, at present, led to go. \* I will merely observe, in conclusion, that it is impossible to read the section and not have the heart drawn out in adoration of the profound wisdom, well-balanced justice, and yet tender considerateness which breathe throughout the whole. We rise up from the study of it with this conviction deeply wrought into the soul, that the One who speaks here is “**the only true,**” “**the only wise,**” and the infinitely gracious God.

**\* I would here observe, once for all, that the feasts referred to in Exodus 23:14-19 and the offerings in Exodus 29 being brought out in all their fullness and detail, in the book of Leviticus, I shall reserve them until we come to dwell upon the contents of that singularly rich and interesting book.**

May all our meditations on His eternal word have the effect of prostrating our souls in worship before Him whose perfect ways and glorious attributes shine there, in all their blessedness and brightness, for the refreshment, the delight, and the edification of His Blood-bought people.

~ end of chapter 21-23 ~

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