

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

IN approaching the study of this remarkable section of our book, the reader must bear in mind that it is by no means to be confounded with chapter 27. Some expositors, in seeking to account for the absence of the blessings in the latter, have sought for them here; but it is a grand mistake – a mistake absolutely fatal to the proper understanding of either chapter. The obvious fact is, the two chapters are wholly distinct, in basis, scope, and practical application.

Chapter 27 is (to put it as pointedly and briefly as possible) moral and personal; chapter 28 is dispensational and national.

That deals with the great root-principle of man's moral condition as a sinner, utterly ruined and wholly incapable of meeting God on the ground of law; this, on the other hand, takes up the question of Israel as a nation, under the government of God.

In short, a careful comparison of the two chapters will enable the reader to see their entire distinctness. For instance, what connection can we trace between the six blessings of our chapter and the twelve curses of chapter 27? None whatever. It is not possible to establish the slightest relationship. But a child can see the moral link between the blessings and curses of chapter 28.

Let us quote a passage or two in proof.

**“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God,”** – the grand old Deuteronomic motto, the key-note of the book – **“to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth; and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God”** – the only safeguard, the true secret of happiness, security, victory, and strength – **“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”**

Is it not perfectly plain to the reader that these are not the blessings pronounced by the six tribes on Mount Gerizim? What is here presented to us is Israel's national dignity, prosperity, and glory, founded upon their diligent attention to all the commandments set before them in this book.

It was the eternal purpose of God that Israel should be pre-eminent on the earth, high above all the nations. This purpose shall assuredly be made good, although Israel, in the past, have shamefully failed to render that perfect obedience which was to form the basis of their national pre-eminence and glory.

We must never forget or surrender this great truth.

Some expositors have adopted a system of interpretation by which the covenant-blessings of Israel are spiritualized and made over to the Church of God. This is a most fatal mistake. Indeed, it is hardly possible to set forth in language, or even to conceive, the pernicious effects of such a method of handling the precious Word of God. Nothing is more certain than that it is diametrically opposed to the mind and will of God. He will not and cannot sanction such tampering with His truth, or such an unwarrantable alienation of the blessings and privileges of His people Israel.

True, we read, in Galatians 3, **“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive”** – what? Blessings in the city and in the field? blessings in our basket and store? Nay; but **“the promise of the Spirit through faith.”**

So also we learn from the same Epistle, in chapter 4, that restored Israel will be permitted to reckon amongst her children all those who are born of the Spirit during the Christian period. **“But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, ‘Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou, that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband.’ “**

All this is blessedly true, but it affords no warrant whatever for transferring the promises made to Israel to New Testament believers.

God has pledged Himself by an oath to bless the seed of Abraham His friend – to bless them with all earthly blessings, in the land of Canaan. This promise holds good, and is absolutely inalienable. Woe be to all who attempt to interfere with its literal fulfillment in God’s own time.

We have referred to this in our studies on the earlier part of this book, and must now rest content with warning the reader most solemnly against every system of interpretation which involves such serious consequences as to the Word and ways of God. We must ever remember that Israel’s blessings are earthly; the Church’s blessings are heavenly.

**“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”**

Thus, both the nature and the sphere of the Church’s blessings are wholly different from those of Israel, and must never be confounded. But the system of interpretation above referred to does confound them, to the marring of the integrity of Holy Scripture, and the serious damage of souls.

To attempt to apply the promises made to Israel to the Church of God, either now or hereafter, on earth or in Heaven, is to turn things completely upside down, and to produce the most hopeless confusion in the exposition and application of Scripture. We feel called upon, in simple faithfulness to the Word of God and to the soul of the reader, to press this matter upon his earnest attention. He may rest assured it is by no means an unimportant question; so far from this, we are persuaded that it is utterly impossible for anyone who confounds Israel and the Church – the earthly and the heavenly, to be a sound or accurate interpreter of the Word of God.

However, we cannot pursue this subject further here. We only trust that the Spirit of God will arouse the heart of the reader to feel its interest and importance, and give him to see the necessity of rightly dividing the word of truth. If this be so, our object will be fully gained.

With regard to this twenty-eighth of Deuteronomy, if the reader only seizes the fact of its entire distinctness from its predecessor, he will be able to read it with spiritual intelligence and real profit. There is no need whatever for elaborate exposition.

It divides itself naturally and obviously into two parts. In the first, we have a full and most blessed statement of the results of obedience (See verses 1-15).; in the second, we have, a deeply solemn and affecting statement of the awful consequences of disobedience. (See verses 16-68). And we cannot but be struck with the fact that the section containing the curses is more than three times the length of the one containing the blessings. That consists of fifteen verses; this, of fifty-three. The whole chapter furnishes an impressive commentary on the government of God, and a most forcible illustration of the fact that **“our God is a consuming fire.”**

All the nations of the earth may learn from Israel’s marvelous history that God must punish disobedience, and that, too, first of all, in His own. And if He has not spared His own people, what shall be the end of those who know Him not?

- **“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”**
- **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

It is the very height of extravagant folly for anyone to attempt to evade the full force of such passages, or to explain them away. It cannot be done. Let anyone read the chapter before us and compare it with the actual history of Israel, and he will see that as sure as there is a God on the throne of the majesty in the heavens, so surely will He punish evildoers, both here and hereafter. It cannot be otherwise. The government that could or would allow evil to go unjudged, uncondemned, unpunished, would not be a perfect government – would not be the government of God.

It is vain to found arguments upon one-sided views of the goodness, kindness, and mercy of God. Blessed be His name, He is kind and good and merciful and gracious, longsuffering and full of compassion; but He is holy and just, righteous and true, and **“He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world [the habitable earth – οἰκουμένην] in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance [given proof – πιστιν] unto all, in that He hath raised Him from the dead”** (Acts 17).

However, we must draw this section to a close; but ere doing so, we feel it to be our duty to call the reader's attention to a very interesting point in connection with verse 13 of our chapter. **“The Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them.”**

This, no doubt, refers to Israel as a nation. They are destined to be the head of all the nations of the earth. Such is the sure and settled purpose and counsel of God respecting them. Low as they are now sunk, scattered and lost amongst the nations, suffering the terrible consequences of their persistent disobedience, sleeping, as we read in Daniel 12, in the dust of the earth, yet they shall, as a nation, arise and shine in far brighter glory than that of Solomon.

All this is blessedly true, and established beyond all question in manifold passages in Moses, the Psalms, the prophets, and the New Testament; but in looking through the history of Israel, we find some very striking instances of individuals who were permitted and enabled, through infinite grace, to make their own of the precious promise contained in verse 13, and that, too, in very dark and depressing periods of the national history, when Israel, as a nation, was the tail and not the head.

We shall just give the reader an instance or two, not only to illustrate our point, but also to set before him a principle of immense practical importance and universal application.

Let us turn for a moment to that charming little book of Esther – a book so little understood or appreciated – a book which, we may truly say, fills a niche and teaches a lesson which no other book does. It belongs to a period when most assuredly Israel was not the head, but the tail; but, notwithstanding, it presents to our view the very edifying and encouraging picture of an individual son of Abraham so carrying himself as to reach the very highest position, and gaining a splendid victory over Israel's bitterest foe.

As to Israel's condition in the days of Esther, it was such that God could not publicly own them. Hence it is that His name is not found in this book, from beginning to end.

The Gentile was the head and Israel the tail. The relationship between the Lord and Israel could no longer be publicly owned; but the heart of the Lord could never forget His people, and, we may add, the heart of a faithful Israelite could never forget the Lord or His holy law; and these are just the two facts that specially characterize this most interesting little book.

God was acting for Israel behind the scenes, and Mordecai was acting for God before the scenes. It is worthy of remark that neither Israel's best Friend nor their worst enemy is once named in the book of Esther, and yet the whole book is full of the actings of both. The finger of God is stamped on every link in the marvelous chain of providence; and on the other hand, the bitter enmity of Amalek comes out in the cruel plot of the haughty Agagite.

All this is intensely interesting. Indeed, in rising from the study of this book, we may well say, “Oh, scenes surpassing fable and yet true.” No romance could possibly exceed in interest this simple but most blessed history. But we must not expatiate, much as we should like to do so.

Time and space forbid. We merely refer to it now in order to point out to the reader the unspeakable value and importance of individual faithfulness at a moment when the national glory was faded and gone. Mordecai stood like a rock for the truth of God. He refused, with stern decision, to own Amalek. He would save the life of Ahasuerus, and bow to his authority as the expression of the power of God; but he would not bow to Haman. His conduct in this matter was governed simply by the Word of God.

The authority for his course was to be found in this blessed book of Deuteronomy – **“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God”** – here was the true secret of the whole matter – **“therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it”** (Chap. 25:17-19).

This was distinct Enoch for every circumcised ear, every obedient heart, every upright conscience. Equally distinct is the language of Exodus 17.

**“And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’ And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi [the Lord my banner]; for he said, ‘Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation’”** (Ver. 14-16).

Here, then, was Mordecai’s authority for refusing a single nod of his head to the Agagite. How could a faithful member of the house of Israel bow to a member of a house with which the Lord was at war? Impossible. He could clothe himself in sackcloth, fast and weep for his people, but he could not, he would not, he dare not, bow to an Amalekite. He might be charged with presumption, blind obstinacy, stupid bigotry, and contemptible narrow-mindedness; but with that he had nothing whatever to do. It might seem the most unaccountable folly to withhold the common mark of respect from the highest noble in the kingdom; but that noble was an Amalekite, and that was enough for Mordecai. The apparent folly was simple obedience.

It is this which makes the case so interesting and important for us. Nothing can ever do away with our responsibility to obey the Word of God. It might be said to Mordecai that the commandment as to Amalek was a by-gone thing, having reference to Israel’s palmy days. It was quite right for Joshua to fight with Amalek; Saul, too, ought to have obeyed the word of the Lord instead of sparing Agag; but now, all was changed; the glory was departed from Israel, and it was perfectly useless to attempt to act on Exodus 17 or Deuteronomy 25.

All such arguments, we feel assured, would have no weight whatever with Mordecai. It was enough for him that the Lord had said, **“Remember what Amalek did . . . Thou shalt not forget it.”**

How long was this to hold good? **“From generation to generation.”** The Lord’s war with Amalek was never to cease until his very name and remembrance were blotted out from under Heaven. And why? Because of his cruel and heartless treatment of Israel. Such was the kindness of God toward His people! How, then, could a faithful Israelite ever bow to an Amalekite? Impossible. Could Joshua bow to Amalek? Nay. Did Samuel? Nay; **“he hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.”** How, then, could Mordecai bow to him? He could not do it, cost what it might. It mattered not to him that the gallows was erected for him. He could be hanged, but he could never do homage to Amalek.

And what was the result? A magnificent triumph!

There stood the proud Amalekite near the throne, basking in the sunshine of royal favor, boasting himself in his riches, his greatness, his glory, and about to crush beneath his foot the seed of Abraham. There, on the other hand, lay poor Mordecai in sackcloth and ashes and tears. What could he do? He could obey. He had neither sword nor spear; but he had the Word of God, and by simply obeying that Word, he gained a victory over Amalek quite as decisive and splendid in its way as that gained by Joshua in Exodus 17 – a victory which Saul failed to gain, though surrounded by a host of warriors selected from the twelve tribes of Israel.

Amalek sought to get Mordecai hanged; but instead of that, he was obliged to act as his footman, and conduct him, in all but regal pomp and splendor, through the street of the city.

**“And Haman answered the king, ‘For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.’ Then the king said to Haman, ‘Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.’ Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, ‘Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.’ And Mordecai came again to the king’s gate; but Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered.”**

Here, assuredly, Israel was the head and Amalek the tail – Israel, not nationally, but individually.

But this was only the beginning of Amalek’s defeat and of Israel’s glory. Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai, **“and Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.”**

Nor was this all. The effect of Mordecai’s marvelous victory was felt far and wide over the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire.

**“In every province, and in every city whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.”** And, to crown all, we read that **“Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.”**

Now, reader, does not all this prove to us, in the most striking manner, the immense importance of individual faithfulness? Is it not eminently calculated to encourage us to stand for the truth of God, cost what it may? Only see what marvelous results followed from the actings of one man! Many might have condemned Mordecai’s conduct. It might have seemed like unaccountable obstinacy to refuse a simple mark of respect to the highest noble in the empire; but it was not so. It was simple obedience; it was decision for God, and it led to a most magnificent victory, the spoils of which were reaped by his brethren at the very ends of the earth.

For further illustration of the subject suggested by Deuteronomy 28:13, we must refer the reader to Daniel 3 and 6. There he will see what morally glorious results can be reached by individual faithfulness to the true God, at a moment when Israel’s national glory was gone – their city and temple in ruins. The three worthies refused to worship the golden image. They dared to face the wrath of the king, to withstand the universal voice of the empire, yea, to meet the fiery furnace itself, rather than disobey. They could surrender life, but they could not surrender the truth of God.

And what was the result? A splendid victory!

They walked through the furnace with the Son of God, and were called forth from the furnace as witnesses and servants of the Most High God. Glorious privilege! wondrous dignity! and all the simple result of obedience.

Had they gone with the crowd, and bowed the head in worship to the national god, in order to escape the dreadful furnace, see what they would have lost! But, blessed be God, they were enabled to stand fast in the confession of the grand foundation-truth of the unity of the Godhead – that truth which had been trampled underfoot amid the splendors of Solomon’s reign; and the record of their faithfulness has been penned for us by the HOLY SPIRIT in order to encourage us to tread, with firm step, the path of individual devotedness, in the face of a God-hating, Christ-rejecting world, and in the face of a truth-neglecting Christendom. It is impossible to read the narrative and not have our whole renewed being stirred up and drawn out in earnest desire for more deep-toned personal devotedness to CHRIST and His precious cause. Similar must be the effect produced by the study of Daniel 6.

We cannot allow ourselves to quote or expatiate; we can only commend the soul-stirring record to the attention of the reader. It is uncommonly fine, and it furnishes a splendid lesson for this day of soft, self-indulgent, easy-going profession, in which it costs people nothing to give a nominal assent to the truths of Christianity; but in which, notwithstanding, there is so little desire or readiness to follow, with whole-hearted decision, a rejected Lord, or to yield an unqualified and unhesitating obedience to His commandments.

How refreshing, in the face of so much heartless indifference, to read of the faithfulness of Daniel!

He, with unflinching decision, persisted in his holy habit of praying three times a day, with his window open toward Jerusalem, although he knew that the den of lions was the penalty of his act.

He might have closed his window and drawn his curtains and retired into the privacy of his chamber to pray, or he might have waited for the midnight hour, when no human eye could see or human ear hear him. But no; this beloved servant of God would not hide his light under a bed or a bushel.

There was a great principle at stake. It was not merely that he would pray to the one living and true God, but he would pray with **“his windows open toward Jerusalem.”** And why **“toward Jerusalem”**? Because it was God’s center. But it was in ruins. True, for the present, and as looked at from a human stand-point; but to faith, and from a divine stand-point, Jerusalem was God’s center for His earthly people. It was, and it shall be, beyond all question. And not only so, but its dust is precious to the Lord; and hence Daniel was in full communion with the mind of God when he opened his windows toward Jerusalem and prayed. He had Scripture for what he did, as the reader may see by referring to II Chronicles 6, **“If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which Thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which Thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Thy name.”**

Here was Daniel’s warrant. This was what he did, utterly regardless of human opinions, and utterly regardless, too, of pains and penalties.

- he would rather be thrown into the den of lions than surrender the truth of God;
- he would rather go to Heaven with a good conscience than remain on earth with a bad one.

And what was the result? Another splendid triumph!

**“Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, BECAUSE HE BELIEVED IN HIS GOD.”**

Blessed servant! noble witness! Assuredly he was the head on this occasion, and his enemies the tail. And how? Simply by obedience to the Word of God.

This is what we deem to be of such vast moral importance for this our day. It is to illustrate and enforce this that we refer to those brilliant examples of individual faithfulness at a time when Israel’s national glory was in the dust, their unity gone, and their polity broken up. We cannot but regard it as a fact full of interest, full of encouragement, full of suggestive power, that in the darkest days of Israel’s history as a nation we have the brightest and noblest examples of personal faith and devotedness.

We earnestly press this upon the attention of the Christian reader.

We consider it eminently calculated to strengthen and cheer up our hearts in standing for the truth of God at a moment like the present, when there is so much to discourage us in the general condition of the professing church. It is not that we are to look for such speedy, striking, and splendid results as were realized in those cases to which we have referred. This is by no means the question.

What we have to keep before our hearts is the fact that, no matter what may be the condition of the ostensible people of God at any given time, it is the privilege of the individual man of God to tread the narrow path and reap the precious fruits of simple obedience to the Word of God and the precious commandments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This, we feel persuaded, is a truth for the day.

May we all feel its holy power.

We are in imminent danger of lowering the standard of personal devotedness because of the general condition. This is a fatal mistake, yea, it is the positive suggestion of the enemy of CHRIST and His cause. If Mordecai, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel had acted thus, what would have been the result?

Ah, no, reader; we have ever to bear in mind that our one great business is, to obey, and leave results with God.

It may please Him to permit His servants to see striking results, or He may see fit to allow them to wait for that great day that is coming, when there will be no danger of our being puffed up by seeing any little fruit of our testimony.

Be this as it may, it is our plain and bounden duty to tread that bright and blessed path indicated for us by the commandments of our precious and adorable Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST.

May God enable us, by the grace of His HOLY SPIRIT, so to do. May we cleave to the truth of God with purpose of heart, utterly regardless of the opinions of our fellow-men who may charge us with narrowness, bigotry, intolerance, and such like.

*We have just to go on with the Lord!*

**~ end of chapter 28 ~**

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