

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER TWO THE MESSAGE OF EXODUS

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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

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IN the book of Exodus nothing is commenced, nothing is finished. To read it, having no acquaintance with the book preceding it, or with those following, would be to be conscious of incompleteness. The first word "**Now**" immediately suggests relation to something which has gone before. The last phrase, "**Throughout all their journeys,**" connects with what is to follow, for the book contains no account of the journeys referred to.

These facts help us to understand the message of the book. It is a part of a larger whole, and its supreme value is its revelation of the procedure of God in human history.

There are two ways in which we may consider the story it tells. We may think of it as a record of the doings of men, or as the record of the doings of God. To adopt the former method is to be impressed with the sense of failure.

The story of Moses is one of failure and weakness, save when he was victorious and strong as the result of his relationship to God. The greatness of the man can only be accounted for in that illuminative, word of the psalmist, "**Thy gentleness hath made me great.**"

Aaron is a perpetual revelation of weakness. The story of the people is one of unceasing failure, caused by their inability to rise to the height of the revelations they received, and manifest in their eager haste to confess themselves able to keep the commandments of God, and their equally eager haste to break those commandments.

To take the other standpoint, that of the Divine procedure, is to discover the line of progress, and to observe the method by which God was moving forward towards the accomplishment of an ultimate purpose. Thus the chief value of the book is its revelation of the fact that human progress has ever been the result of the grace and the patience of God.

Its permanent values, then, are its revelations of the methods of God, and the responsibilities of man.

Let us consider these values, and from them deduce the living message of the book.

The principles of the Divine procedure are eternally the same. His methods change as they follow the law of adaptation to new ages, and consequently new requirements. In this book we are observing these methods in their earliest stages; and we shall notice them in three particulars which may thus be stated.

- The Divine method with the race, and the responsibility of the race in the light thereof.
- The Divine method with the instrument, and the responsibility of that instrument.
- The Divine method with the individual, and the responsibility of the individual.

As to the Divine method with the race. This book is the story of the nation. In our analysis it has been termed the emergence of the nation.

In the final division of Genesis, that of Regeneration, we have the account of the calling of a man, the creation of a family, and the multiplication of the families; until at its close we see a multitude of people in the land of Goshen, their moral fiber being tempered by suffering; as yet without national consciousness or national power.

In Exodus the story of the emergence of this multitude into a nation is told.

- Its first division reveals a people in bondage;
- Its second tells the story of deliverance from bondage, by the hand of God; and
- Its last gives an account of their organization into national life.

It is important that we should understand the meaning of the creation of this nation.

It cannot be too often emphasized that it was not the election of a nation from among others in order that upon that nation God might lavish His love while He abandoned the others. The purpose of God was far wider than that of the creation of this nation; it was that of the creation of a testimony through this nation, for the sake of the others.

The Divine intention was the creation of a people who under His government should reveal in the world the breadth and beauty and beneficence of that government; a people who, gathered in their national life about His throne and His altar, obeying His commands and worshipping Him, should reveal to outside nations the meaning of the Kingship of God. It was not the selection of a pet, but the creation of a pattern.

The story, then, of the nation is that of the creation of a testimony, and the Divine insurance of its proclamation through both the failure and the success of the people. The method is to human seeming a long and tedious one, but it is the only one possible. It is that which God has ever followed. He constantly embodies a truth in an instrument; either a man, a society, or a nation; in order that other men, other societies, other nations may understand it.

The responsibilities of the races, in the midst of which the testimony is borne, are created and limited by that testimony.

The method of God with the instrument was that of progressive revelation of Himself.

That movement is clearly marked in this book of Exodus. The first distinct revelation was that made to a man by the mystery of the burning bush and the declaration, "**I AM**"; the vision of a bush ablaze with fire, and yet not consumed: a voice declaring essential being, and giving no explanation. A little further on there was a further unveiling of the meaning of the first word, "**I AM**," in the exposition of the values of the name JEHOVAH. That great name had been known as a name, but its intention had not been understood. This truth was revealed to Moses in a passage full of beauty, which opens and closes with the simple declaration, "**I am the Lord**"; and in its course affirms His power to lead His people out, and to bring them in. That is to say, the name was explained as revealing the fact of God's ability to become to His people whatever their need demanded.

For a clear statement of the values of the name the Lord God the student may with profit turn to the article in the *Emphasized Bible* by Mr. Rotherham.

This was the second stage of Divine Self-revelation to this people. The "**I AM**" of the burning bush, full of infinite majesty, in the presence of which man could only worship, was now seen to be the One who becomes what His people need, the One who enters into all their circumstances with them, in strong ability.

Later on, after the deliverance, and as the work of organization was about to commence, God revealed Himself to them as the God of grace in His declaration, **“Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people . . . and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”**

Almost immediately following, and with startling suddenness there is a further revelation as He manifested Himself as the God of law. The people imagined they were able to keep the covenant He proposed to make with them. They did not know their own weakness, and consequently, almost immediately after He had spoken of making them His own peculiar treasure, the word went forth which commanded that they should not be allowed to touch the mountain from the midst of which the thunder of His law was to be uttered. Yet again, Moses and the elders were permitted to go into the very presence of God. There is perhaps no more wonderful chapter in the whole book than that which gives the account of how these men saw God while **“He laid not His hand”** upon them.

There is no description of what they saw, but they saw Him. Thus they came one step further along the line of revelation, and discovered that the infinite mystery of the Being of the burning bush was also personal, in some such way that they might see and eat in His presence, while they were unable to describe what they had seen. The personality of God was not there fully unveiled. All its deepest meaning was not yet revealed; but the fact was declared and made real to the consciousness.

Still later to Moses, on behalf of the people, the Lord proclaimed the glory of His essential nature, in that matchless passage: **“The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”** (Exodus 34:6-7).

Finally, the overwhelming and stupendous fact of the glory of God was demonstrated in the hour when, the tabernacle having been reared according to pattern, the Divine presence filled it, and the priests were unable to stand and minister in His presence.

This rapid survey helps us to see that while all the details, such as the technicalities of the legal code, and the minutiae of the instructions concerning the construction of the tabernacle, are important, the supreme method of God in dealing with the instrument through which He should reveal Himself among the nations was that of unveiling the truth concerning Himself to them, ever leading them a little deeper into the mystery, giving them some new gleam of its light, offering them fresh unveilings, and so conducting them into higher realms of spiritual apprehension.

Side by side with this unveiling of Himself, His method is seen to be that of direct and minute administration of the affairs of their lives. The responsibility of the instrument may now be stated in the briefest way as twofold; that, namely, of worship and obedience.

Finally, Exodus reveals the Divine method with, and the consequent responsibility of, the individual.

There are two notable illustrations - Pharaoh and Moses. God's method with each was the same, while the issue was different.

The case of Pharaoh is that of a man strong, acute, but rebellious - a man who acted wholly by sight and upon the basis of policy. God's attitude towards him was that of giving him every opportunity to make his own choice, and work it out into destiny.

His method with Moses was the same. He was a man strong, capable, and obedient. Instead of acting by sight, and on the basis of policy, he "**endured as seeing Him who is invisible,**" and thus lived and triumphed by faith. With him the dealings of God were ever those of a great patience as He led him on, step by step, until His gentleness had made him great.

- God's patience condemned Pharaoh.
- God's patience crowned Moses.

The Divine method with these two representative men, both of them notable leaders, was that of giving each man his opportunity of choice; not leaving him wholly to the dictates of his own lust and desire, but attempting, by patience and persuasion, to direct his choice. Therefore human responsibility is clearly revealed to be that of choice, and ultimately, therefore, that of the creation of destiny.

The history of these two men is indeed a remarkable revelation of abiding truth.

- One faulty, failing, sometimes even cowardly, rose into a strange dignity and nobleness of character, because he chose to submit to the government of God.
- The other strong, astute, moved with determination towards destruction, not because God elected him to destruction, but because he refused God's ministry and patience, and the prolonged opportunity which was given to him.

The living message of Exodus is twofold.

- It reveals the fact of the sovereignty of God, and
- The true method for the saving of men.

In Genesis we found the fundamental revelation of man's immediate relationship to God, and the declaration that faith is the one principle by which man may realize his life. These same truths are in Exodus, but with a changed emphasis. The God to whom man is related is declared to be Sovereign. Man in his failure is taught that his faith must express itself in worship and obedience.

The whole truth concerning God revealed in the book of Exodus may be expressed concisely in the stately language of the psalmist:

**“Clouds and darkness are round about Him:
Righteousness and judgment are the habitation [foundation] of His throne.”**

The two words by the use of which the psalmist describes the throne of God are most suggestive - **“righteousness and judgment.”** These are the two elements in the method of God with His people which are clearly revealed in the book of Exodus, and which in combination constitute the foundation of His throne.

The meaning of righteousness is so apparent as to need little explanation. Perhaps its value in this connection may be more clearly seen by abbreviating the word. To omit the central syllable is to have the word, *rightness*; and once again, to drop the final one is to have the simple word, *right*. As a matter of fact, this is the simple and essential meaning of the Hebrew word. Right, then, is one element in the strength of the foundation of the throne of God.

This whole book delivers that message with unvarying insistence. The government of God is right, in purpose and in method. In its operation there is no deviation from that which is strictly, absolutely, eternally, essentially right.

The other word “judgment” helps to an understanding of the word right. We are in perpetual danger of misinterpreting the meaning of judgment by emphasizing only one of its values. The Hebrew word translated **“judgment”** literally means *verdict*. That by no means expresses all the values which by use it came to represent. It does, however, suggest the root principle that lies within it - that, namely, of discrimination.

This particular word signifying verdict comes from another which means *to judge, to come to a decision, to find a verdict, to pronounce sentence*.

For our understanding of the intention of the great declaration we may with advantage make use of a word which at first seems to be entirely foreign, but which in reality catches the very heart of the meaning - the word *method*.

Righteousness and method are the foundation of His throne. We all use the word judgment in that sense in regard to our fellow men, and in so doing are more true to its real intention than we are when we use it in regard to God, as though it simply indicated His punishment of man. Of some man whom we hold in high esteem we say that he is a man of rare judgment. That is the true use of the word. We do not mean by that that his one characteristic is that of visiting evil with punishment, although we do know that the man of true judgment will be angry with wrong.

The fact that God is a God of judgment does most certainly include within it the truth that He is angry in the presence of wrong; and moreover, that He will visit upon sin His hot indignation. The supreme demonstration of this truth, as of all others, is to be found in Christ, who was capable of saying, **“Depart, ye cursed,”** as surely as **“Come, ye blessed.”**

Judgment, however, means that, and infinitely more. Taken in conjunction with righteousness, it shows that in His government all His activity is that of method, based upon right. As the God of judgment He led and exalted Moses, and led and cast down Pharaoh.

In this book of Exodus we see the government of God based upon righteousness and judgment, illustrated in His dealing with His people.

His government is that of wisdom. This is revealed in His selection of time, places, and instruments.

In the first five verses of Exodus is a list of names of those who went into Egypt with Jacob, followed by these words, “**And Joseph was in Egypt already.**”

It is perfectly true that he was there through the hatred and crime of his brethren, but this book reveals the deeper reason of his being there; and God is seen seated high upon His throne of righteous method, selecting a man, and a time, and a place. This surely was Joseph’s understanding of all the painful story, for when his brethren came eventually into his presence, he said, “**It was not you that sent me hither, but God.**”

Throughout the whole of this book it is manifest that no contingencies surprise Him, no exigencies find Him unprepared; but that in all circumstances and in all conditions, He is perfect in wisdom and in power; and that in His operation the largest and smallest things are taken account of, and pressed into service.

One illustration. of this will suffice. Ere the people could become a nation it was necessary that their moral fiber should be stiffened. For this God was strong and patient enough to wait four centuries. The hour approaching for their deliverance, He opened a door through the cry of a baby, as that cry touched a woman’s heart, and admitted a Hebrew to the Court of Pharaoh. This God is the God we adore, manipulating ages and events, and compelling them to minister to things of a moment; and at the same time, touching the tiniest and simplest things of life, and compelling them to issues which include centuries.

As to the saving of man, Exodus teaches that faith expresses itself in worship and obedience.

This is not a haphazard choosing of words. Thou shalt worship and obey is the all-inclusive command of the sovereign God.

Worship consists in putting God at the center of the life; and service in seeing to it that all the life is centered in Him. That was the supreme revelation to the men of this nation. At its center there was an ark. The nations knew eventually that there was something strange and mystic connected with that ark; and attempted to capture it, with what difficulty and trouble to themselves subsequent books reveal. It was only an ark, but it was the symbol of the truth that at the center of human life God must be enthroned. That is worship in its first movement.

It is not, however, completed until it expresses itself in obedience.

To place the ark beneath the curtains at the center of the encampment, and then to go away to break the law is not worship; it is blasphemy.

The ark being placed there, and God being recognized, He must be obeyed in every department and activity of the life. To study the ethical code of this book is to discover that in all the minutest matters of food and raiment and habits and friendship, the will of God must be discovered and obeyed.

Moreover, the story teaches that obedience must be persistent even against opposition.

This is perhaps most remarkably revealed in the story of how Moses persisted in his determination to obey the command of God in spite of the opposition raised by Pharaoh. Pharaoh attempted to prevent their going away to worship. He first declared they should not go. Then under compulsion, in effect he said, You may worship in your own way, but you must do it in the land. The answer of Moses declared their determination to go three days' journey, according to the Divine command.

Then Pharaoh suggested compromise as he urged that if they must go outside his land, they should not go far away. Again the answer was one which insisted upon the three days' journey.

Yet again Pharaoh proposed that if they must go themselves they should leave their children behind. To this they refused to give one moment's attention, and again the declaration was made, "**We and our children.**"

Finally, Pharaoh's last appeal was made, to leave their cattle; and to that the ultimate answer was given, "**There shall not an hoof be left behind.**"

This story is indeed a living message to our own age revealing the necessity for absolute and uttermost obedience.

The call of God is to separation, and the world urges us to remain in the land, and be neighborly. It is ours to reply that friendship with the world is enmity against God.

Then we are told that if we insist upon being peculiar it is not necessary to compel our children to be so. God grant that our answer may ever be, "**We and our children.**"

The last suggestion of the enemy is that we should leave our cattle, that it is necessary for us to conduct our business according to the spirit of the age.

The final answer of the Christian is ever that which declares that not a hoof shall be left behind.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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