

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“AND it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name there” – not to a place of their own or others’ choosing – **“And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God”** (Ver. 1-4).

The chapter on which we now enter contains the lovely ordinance of the basket of first-fruits, in which we shall find some principles of the deepest interest and practical importance. It was when the hand of the Lord had conducted His people into the land of promise that the fruits of that land could be presented. It was obviously necessary to be in Canaan ere Canaan’s fruits could be offered in worship. The worshiper was able to say, **“I profess this day unto the Lord thy God that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us.”**

Here lay the root of the matter – **“I am come.”** He does not say, I am coming, hoping to come or longing to come. No; but, **“I am come.”** Thus it must ever be. We must know ourselves saved ere we can offer the fruits of a known salvation. We may be most sincere in our desires after salvation, most earnest in our efforts to obtain it; but then we cannot but see that efforts to be saved, and the fruits of a known and enjoyed salvation, are wholly different. The Israelite did not offer the basket of first-fruits in order to get into the land, but because he was actually in it. **“I profess this day . . . that I am come.”** There is no mistake about it – no question, no doubt, not even a hope – I am actually in the land, and here is the fruit of it.

“And thou shalt speak, and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father; and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression; and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders; and He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

“And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God; and thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.”

This is a very beautiful illustration of worship

“A Syrian ready to perish.” Such was the origin. There is nothing to boast of, so far as nature is concerned. And as to the condition in which grace had found them, what of it? Hard bondage in the land of Egypt; toiling amid the brick-kilns, beneath the cruel lash of Pharaoh’s taskmasters. But then, **“We cried unto the Lord.”** Here was their sure and blessed resource. It was all they could do, but it was enough. That cry of helplessness went directly up to the throne and to the heart of God, and brought Him down into the very midst of the brick-kilns of Egypt.

Hear the Lord’s gracious words to Moses – **“I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey . . . Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me; and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them”** (Exodus 3:7-9).

Such was the immediate response of the Lord to the cry of His people. **“I am come down to deliver them.”** Yes, blessed be His name, He came down, in the exercise of His own free and sovereign grace, to deliver His people; and no power of men or devils – earth or hell could hold them for a moment beyond the appointed time. Hence, in our chapter, we have the grand result as set forth in the language of the worshiper and in the contents of his basket. **“I am come unto the country which the Lord swore unto our fathers for to give us . . . And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me.”**

The Lord had accomplished all, according to the love of His heart and the faithfulness of His word. Not one jot or tittle had failed – **“I am come”** And **“I have brought the fruit.”** The fruit of what? Of Egypt? Nay; but **“of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me.”**

The worshiper’s lips proclaimed the completeness of the Lord’s work; the worshiper’s basket contained the fruit of the Lord’s land. Nothing could be simpler, nothing more real. There was no room for a doubt, no ground for a question. He had simply to declare the Lord’s work and show the fruit. It was all of God from first to last. He had brought them out of Egypt, and He had brought them into Canaan. He had filled their baskets with the mellow fruits of His land, and their hearts with His praise.

And now, beloved reader, let us just ask you, do you think it was presumption on the part of the Israelite to speak as he did? Was it right, was it modest, was it humble, of him to say, **“I am come”**? Would it have been more becoming in him merely to give expression to the faint hope that at some future period he might come? Would doubt and hesitation as to his position and his portion have been more honoring and gratifying to the God of Israel? What say you?

It may be that, anticipating our argument, you are ready to say, There is no analogy. Why not? If an Israelite could say, **“I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us,”** why cannot the believer now say, I am come unto JESUS? True, in the one case, it was sight; in the other, it is faith. But is the latter less real than the former?

Does not the inspired apostle say to the Hebrews, **“Ye we come unto Mount Zion”?** and again, **“We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God with reverence and godly fear.”**

If we are in doubt as to whether we have **“come”** or not, and as to whether we have **“received the kingdom”** or not, it is impossible to worship in truth or serve with acceptance. It is when we are in intelligent and peaceful possession of the place and portion in Christ that true worship can ascend to the throne above, and effective service be rendered in the vineyard below.

For what, let us ask, is true worship?

It is simply telling out, in the presence of God, what He is, and what He has done. It is the heart occupied with and delighting in God and in all His marvelous actings and ways. Now, if we have no knowledge of God, and no faith in what He has done, how can we worship Him? **“He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”** But then to know God is eternal life. I cannot worship God if I do not know Him, and I cannot know Him without having eternal life. The Athenians had erected an altar **“to the unknown God,”** and Paul told them that they were worshipping in ignorance, and proceeded to declare unto them the true God as revealed in the Person and work of the Man Christ Jesus.

It is deeply important to be clear as to this.
I must know God ere I can worship Him.

I may **“feel after Him, if haply I may find Him;”** but feeling after One whom I have not found, and worshipping and delighting in One whom I have found, are two totally different things.

God has revealed Himself, blessed be His name! He has given us the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. He has come near to us in the Person of that blessed One, so that we may know Him, love Him, trust in Him, delight in Him, and use Him, in all our weakness and in all our need. We have no longer to grope for Him amid the darkness of nature, nor yet among the clouds and mists of spurious religion, in its ten thousand forms. No; our God has made Himself known by a revelation so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool in all beside, may not err therein.

The Christian can say, **“I know whom I have believed.”** This is the basis of all true worship. There may be a vast amount of fleshly pietism, mechanical religion, and ceremonial routine without a single atom of true spiritual worship. This latter can only flow from the knowledge of God.

Active benevolence

But our object is not to write a treatise on worship, but simply to unfold to our readers the instructive and beautiful ordinance of the basket of first-fruits. And having shown that worship was the first thing with an Israelite who found himself in possession of the land – and further, that we now must know our place and privilege in Christ before we can truthfully and intelligently worship the Father – we shall proceed to point out another very important practical result illustrated in our chapter, namely, active benevolence.

“When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all Thy commandments, which Thou hast commanded me; I have not transgressed Thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them” (Ver. 12, 13).

Nothing can be more beautiful than the moral order of these things. It is precisely similar to what we have in Hebrews 13. **“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”** Here is the worship.

“But to do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Here is the active benevolence putting both together, we have what we may call the upper and the nether side of the Christian’s character-praising God and doing good to men. Precious characteristics! May we exhibit them more faithfully.

One thing is certain, they will always go together. Show us a man whose heart is full of praise to God, and we will show you one whose heart is open to every form of human need. He may not be rich in this world’s goods; he may be obliged to say, like one of old who was not ashamed to say it, **“Silver and gold have I none;”** but he will have the tear of sympathy, the kindly look, the soothing word, and these things tell far more powerfully upon a sensitive heart than the opening of the purse-strings, and the jingling of silver and gold.

Our adorable Lord and Master, our great Exemplar, **“went about doing good;”** but we never read of His giving money to anyone; indeed, we are warranted in believing that the blessed One never possessed a penny. When He wanted to answer the Herodians on the subject of paying tribute to Caesar, He had to ask them to show Him a penny; and when asked to pay tribute, He sent Peter to the sea to get it. He never carried money, and most assuredly money is not named in the category of gifts bestowed by Him upon His servants. Still He went about doing good, and we are to do the same, in our little measure; it is at once our high privilege and our bounden duty to do so. And let the reader mark the divine order laid down in Hebrews 13 and illustrated in Deuteronomy 26. Worship gets the first, the highest place. Let us never forget this. We, in our wisdom or our sentimentality, might imagine that doing good to men, usefulness, philanthropy, is the highest thing; but it is not so. **“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.”** God inhabits the praises of His people. He delights to surround Himself with hearts filled to overflowing with a sense of His goodness, His greatness, and His glory. Hence, we are to offer the sacrifice of praise to God **“continually.”**

So also the Psalmist says, **“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my month.”** It is not merely now and then, or when all is bright and cheery around us, when everything goes on smoothly and prosperously; no, but **“at all times” – “continually.”** The stream of thanksgiving is to flow uninterruptedly. There is no interval for murmuring or complaining, fretfulness or dissatisfaction, gloom or despondency. Praise and thanksgiving are to be our continual occupation.

We are ever to cultivate the spirit of worship. Every breath, as it were, ought to be a hallelujah. Thus it shall be by and by. Praise will be our happy and holy service while eternity rolls along its course of golden ages. When we shall have no further call to “communicate,” no demand on our resources or our sympathies, when we shall have bid an eternal adieu to this scene of sorrow and need, death and desolation, then shall we – praise our God for evermore, without let or interruption, in the sanctuary of His own blessed presence above.

“But to do good and to communicate forget not.”

There is singular interest attaching to the mode in which this is put. He does not say, But to offer the sacrifice of praise forget not. No; but lest, in the full and happy enjoyment of our own place and portion in Christ, we should “forget” that we are passing through a scene of want and misery, trial and pressure, the apostle adds the salutary and much-needed admonition as to doing good and communicating.

The spiritual Israelite is not only to rejoice in every good thing which the Lord his God has bestowed upon him, but he is also to remember the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow – that is, the one who has no earthly portion, and is thoroughly devoted to the Lord’s work, and the one who has no home, the one who has no natural protector, and the one who has no earthly stay. It must ever be thus. The rich tide of grace rolls down from the bosom of God, fills our hearts to overflowing, and in its overflow, refreshes and gladdens our whole sphere of action.

If we were only living in the enjoyment of what is ours in God, our every movement, our every act, our every word, yea, our every look, would do good. The Christian, according to the divine idea, is one who stands with one hand lifted up to God in the presentation of the sacrifice of praise, and the other hand filled with the fragrant fruits of genuine benevolence to meet every form of human need.

O beloved reader, let us deeply ponder these things; let us really apply our whole hearts to the earnest consideration of them; let us seek a fuller realization and a truer expression of these two great branches of practical Christianity, and not be satisfied with anything less.

Practical Sanctification

We shall now briefly glance at the third point in the precious chapter before us. We shall do little more than quote the passage for the reader.

The Israelite, having presented his basket and distributed his tithes, was further instructed to say,

“I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away aught thereof for any unclean use, nor given aught thereof for the dead; but I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that Thou hast commanded me. Look down from Thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Thy people Israel, and the land which Thou hast given us, as Thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey. This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments; thou shalt therefore keep and do them, with all thine heart and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes and His commandments and His judgments, and to hearken unto His voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people” – that is, a people of His own special possession – **“as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all His commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which He hath made, in praise and in name and in honor; and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God, as He hath spoken”** (Ver. 14-19).

Here we have personal holiness, practical sanctification, entire separation from every thing inconsistent with the holy place and relationship into which they had been introduced, in the sovereign grace and mercy of God.

There must be no mourning, no uncleanness, no dead works. We have no room, no time, for any such things as these; they do not belong to that blessed sphere in which we are privileged to live and move and have our being.

We have just three things to do:

- We look up to God, and offer the sacrifice of praise;
- We look around at a needy world, and do good;
- We look in upon the circle of our own being – our inner life, and seek, by grace, to keep ourselves unspotted.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

Thus, whether we hearken to Moses in Deuteronomy 26, or to Paul in Hebrews 13, or to James in his most wholesome, needed, practical Epistle, it is the same Spirit that speaks to us, and the same grand lessons that are impressed upon us – lessons of unspeakable value and moral importance – lessons loudly called for in this day of easy-going profession, in the which the doctrines of grace are taken up and held in a merely intellectual way, and connected with all sorts of worldliness and self-indulgence.

Truly, there is an urgent need of a more powerful, practical ministry amongst us. There is a deplorable lack of the prophetic and pastoral element in our ministrations.

By the prophetic element, we mean that character of ministry that deals with the conscience, and brings it into the immediate presence of God.

This is greatly needed. There is a good deal of ministry which addresses itself to the intelligence, but sadly too little for the heart and the conscience. The teacher speaks to the understanding; the prophet speaks to the conscience; * the pastor speaks to the heart.

*** Very many seem to entertain the idea that a prophet is one who foretells future events, but it would be a mistake thus to confine the term. I Corinthians 14:28-32 lets us into the meaning of the words “prophet” and “prophesying.” The teacher and the prophet are closely and beautifully connected. The teacher unfolds truth from the Word of God; the prophet applies it to the conscience; and, we may add, the pastor sees how the ministry of both the one and the other is acting on the heart and in the life.**

We speak, of course, generally. It may so happen that the three elements are found in the ministry of one man; but they are distinct; and we cannot but feel that where the prophetic and pastoral gifts are lacking in any assembly, the teachers should very earnestly wait upon the Lord for spiritual power to deal with the hearts and consciences of His beloved people. Blessed be His name, He has all needed gift, grace, and power for His servants. All we need is, to wait on Him in real earnestness and sincerity of heart, and He will most assuredly supply us with all suited grace and moral fitness for whatever service we may be called to render in His Church.

Oh, that all the Lord’s servants may be stirred up to a more deep-toned earnestness, in every department of His blessed world May we be “**instant in season, out of season,**” and in no wise discouraged by the condition of things around us, but rather find in that very condition an urgent reason for more intense devotedness.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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