

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE TO FIFTY

IN perusing these interesting sections of inspiration, we perceive a remarkable chain of providential actings all tending to one grand point, namely, the exaltation of the man who had been in the pit; and at the same time bringing out by the way a number of subordinate objects.

“**The thoughts of many hearts**” were to be “**revealed;**” but Joseph was to be exalted.

“**He called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron; until the time that His Word came; the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance; to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his senators wisdom.**” (Psalm 105:16-22).

It is well to see that the leading object was to exalt the one whom men had rejected; and then to produce in those same men a sense of their sin in rejecting. And how admirably all this is effected! The most trivial and the most important, the most likely and the most unlikely circumstances are made to minister to the development of God’s purposes.

In Chapter 39, Satan uses Potiphar’s wife, and in Chapter 40, he uses Pharaoh’s chief butler. The former he used to put Joseph into the dungeon; and the latter he used to keep him there, through his ungrateful negligence; but all in vain. God was behind the scenes.

His finger was guiding all the springs of the vast machine of circumstances, and when the due time was come, he brought forth the man of his purpose, and set his feet in a large room.

Now, this is ever God’s prerogative. He is above all, and can use all for the accomplishment of his grand and unsearchable designs.

It is sweet to be able thus to trace our Father’s hand and counsel in everything, Sweet to know that all sorts of agents are at his sovereign disposal; angels, men, and devils - all are under his omnipotent hand, and all are made to carry out his purposes. In the Scripture now before us, all this is seen in a most remarkable manner.

God visits the domestic circle of a heathen captain, the household of a heathen king, yea, and his bed-side, and makes the very visions of his head upon his bed contribute to the development of his counsels. Nor is it merely individuals and their circumstances that we see thus taken up and used for the furtherance of God's ends; but Egypt and all the surrounding countries are brought into the scene; in short, the whole earth was prepared by the hand of God to be a theatre on which to display the glory and greatness of the one **"who was separate from his brethren."**

Such are God's ways; and it is one of the happiest and most elevating exercises for the soul of a saint to trace thus the admirable actings of his heavenly Father. How forcibly is God's providence brought out in this profoundly interesting history of Joseph!

Look, for a moment, into the dungeon of the captain of the guard. See there a man **"laid in iron,"** charged with a most abominable crime - the outcast and offscouring of society; and yet see him, almost in a moment, raised to the very highest eminence, and who can deny that God is in it all?

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him to ride in the second chariot that he had: and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." (Chapter 41:39-44).

Here, then, was exaltation of no ordinary kind.

Contrast this with the pit and the dungeon; and mark the chain of events by which it was all brought about, and you have, at once, a marked exhibition of the hand of God, and a striking type of the sufferings and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joseph was taken from the pit and the dungeon, into which he had been brought by the envy of his brethren, and the false judgment of the Gentile, to be ruler over the whole land of Egypt, and not only so, but to be the channel of blessing, and the sustainer of life, to Israel and the whole earth.

This is all typical of Christ; indeed, a type could hardly be more perfect. We see a man laid, to all intents and purposes in the place of death, by the hand of man, and then raised up by the hand of God, and set in dignity and glory.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22-24).

But there are two points in Joseph's history which, together with what has been noticed, render the type remarkably perfect; I allude to his marriage with a stranger in Chapter 41, and his interview with his brethren in Chapter 45.

The following is the order of events.

- Joseph presents himself to his brethren as one sent by the father;
- They reject him, and, so far as lies in them, put him in the place of death;
- God takes him up from thence, and raises him to a position of highest dignity;
- Thus exalted, he gets a bride; and
- When his brethren according to the flesh, are thoroughly broken and prostrate before him, he makes himself known to them, tranquillizes their hearts, and brings them into blessing;
- He then becomes the channel of blessing to them and to the whole world.

I shall just make a few remarks on Joseph's marriage and the restoration of his brethren. The strange wife shadows forth the Church. Christ presented himself to the Jews, and being rejected, took his seat on high, and sent down the Holy Ghost to gather out an elect Church composed of Jew and Gentile, to be united with him in heavenly glory.

The doctrine of the Church has already been dwelt upon in our remarks on Chapter 24, but one or two points remain to be noticed here. And first, we may observe that Joseph's Egyptian bride was intimately associated with him in his glory.*

*** Joseph's wife sets forth the Church as united to Christ in his glory; Moses' wife presents the Church as united to Christ in his rejection.**

She, as being part of Himself, shared in all that was His. Moreover, she occupied a place of nearness and intimacy known only to herself. Thus it is with the Church, the bride of the Lamb. She is gathered to Christ to be the sharer, at once, of his rejection and his glory. It is Christ's position which gives character to the position of the Church, and her position should ever give character to her walk. If we are gathered to Christ, it is as exalted in glory, and not as humbled down here.

“Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” (II Corinthians 5:16).

The Church's gathering-point is Christ in glory.

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

There is far more of practical value in the clear apprehension of this principle than might, at first sight, appear. It is ever the aim of Satan, as it is the tendency of our hearts, to lead us to stop short of God's mark in everything, and specially in the centre of our unity as Christians. It is a popular sentiment, that “the Blood of the Lamb is the union of saints,” i. e., it is the Blood which forms their centre of unity.

Now, that it is the infinitely precious blood of Christ which sets us individually as worshippers in the presence of God is blessedly true. The blood, therefore, forms the divine basis of our fellowship with God.

But when we come to speak of the centre of our unity as a church, we must see that the Holy Ghost gathers us to the Person of a risen and glorified Christ; and this grand truth gives character - high and holy character - to our association as Christians.

If we take lower ground than this we must inevitably form a sect or an ism. If we gather round an ordinance, however important, or round a truth, however indisputable, we make something less than Christ our center. Hence, it is more important to ponder the practical consequences which flow out of the truth of our being gathered to a risen and glorified Head in the heavens.

If Christ were on earth, we should be gathered to Him here; but, inasmuch as He is hidden in the heavens, the Church takes her character from His position there. Hence, Christ could say, **“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;”** and again, **“For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”** (John 17:16, 19).

So, also, in I Peter, we read, **“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious; ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”** (Chapter 2:4, 5).

If we are gathered to Christ we must be gathered to him as he is, and where he is; and the more the Spirit of God leads our souls into the understanding of this, the more clearly we shall see the character of walk that becomes us.

Joseph’s bride was united to him, not in the pit or the dungeon, but in the dignity and glory of his position in Egypt; and, in her case, we can have no difficulty in perceiving the vast difference between the two positions.

But farther we read, **“And unto Joseph were born two sons, before the years of famine came.”**

There was a time of trouble coming; but previous thereto the fruit of his union appeared. The children whom God had given him were called into existence previous to this time of trial. So will it be in reference to the Church. All the members thereof will be called out, the whole body will be completed and gathered to the Head in Heaven, previous to **“the great tribulation”** which shall come upon all the earth.

We shall now turn for a little to Joseph’s interview with his brethren, in which we shall find some points of resemblance to Israel’s history in the latter day. During the period that Joseph was hidden from the view of his brethren, these latter were called to pass through deep and searching trial,- through intensely painful exercises of conscience.

One of these exercises is poured out in the following words:

“And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also, his blood is required” (Chapter 42:21, 22).

Again, in Chapter 44, we read, **“And Judah said, What shall we say unto my Lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.”**

None can teach like God. He alone can produce in the conscience the true sense of sin, and bring the soul down into the profound depths of its own condition in his presence. This is all his own work. Men run on in their career of guilt, heedless of everything, until the arrow of the Almighty pierces their conscience, and then they are led into those searchings of heart, and intense exercises of soul, which can only find relief in the rich resources of redeeming love.

Joseph’s brethren had no conception of all that was to flow to them from their actings toward him. **“They took him and cast him into a pit . . . and they sat down to eat bread.” “Woe to them . . . that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph”** (Amos 6:6).

However, God produced grief of heart, and exercises of conscience, and that in a most wonderful way. Years rolled on, and these brethren might have vainly imagined that all was right; but, then, **“seven years of plenty, and seven years of scarcity!”** What did they mean? Who sent them? And for what were they designed? Admirable providence! Unsearchable wisdom!

The famine reaches to Canaan, and the calls of hunger actually bring the guilty brethren to the feet of the injured Joseph!

How marked is the display of God’s own hand in all this! There they stand, with the arrow of conviction thrust through and through their consciences, in the presence of the man whom they had, **“with wicked hands,”** cast into the pit.

Surely their sin had found them out; but it was in the presence of Joseph. Blessed place!

“Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.” (Chapter 45:1).

No stranger was allowed to witness this sacred scene. What stranger could understand or appreciate it? We are here called to witness, as it were, divinely-wrought conviction in the presence of divine grace; and we may say, when these two come together there is an easy settlement of every question.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life And God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you sent me hither, but God.”

This is grace indeed, setting the convicted conscience perfectly at rest.

The brethren had, already, most thoroughly condemned themselves, and hence Joseph had only to pour in the blessed balm into their broken hearts.

This is all sweetly typical of God’s dealings with Israel, in the latter day, when they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn. Then they shall prove the reality of divine grace, and the cleansing efficacy of that **“fountain which shall be opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness”** (Zechariah 13:1).

In the third chapter of Acts, we find the Spirit of God in Peter seeking to produce this divine conviction in the consciences of the Jews.

“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.”

These statements were designed to elicit from the hearts and lips of the bearers the confession made by Joseph’s brethren - **“We are verily guilty.”**

Then follows the grace.

“And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

We here see that, although the Jews really carried out the enmity of their hearts in the death of Christ, as did also Joseph’s brethren in their treatment of him, yet, the grace of God to each is seen in this, that all is shown to be decreed and foreshown of God for their blessing.

This is perfect grace, surpassing all human thought; and all that is needed in order to the enjoyment thereof, is a conscience truly convicted by the truth of God.

Those who could say, **“We are verily guilty,”** could rightly understand the words of precious grace, **“It was not you, but God.”**

Thus it must ever be. The soul that has thoroughly pronounced its own condemnation, is prepared to understand and appreciate God's pardon.

The remaining chapters of this book are taken up with the removal of Jacob and his family into Egypt, and their settlement there; Joseph's actings during the remaining years of famine; Jacob's blessing the twelve patriarchs; his death and burial.

We shall not dwell in detail upon these things, though the spiritual mind may find much to feed upon therein. *

*** The close of Jacob's career stands in most pleasing contrast with all the previous scenes of his eventful history. It reminds one of a serene evening, after a tempestuous day: the sun, which during the day had been hidden from view by clouds, mists, and fogs, sets in majesty and brightness, gilding with his beams the western sky, and holding out the cheering prospect of a bright tomorrow. Thus is it with our aged patriarch. The supplanting, the bargain-making, the cunning, the management, the shifting, the shutting, the unbelieving selfish fears,- all those dark clouds of nature and of earth seem to have passed away, and he comes forth in all the calm elevation of faith, to bestow blessings, and impart dignities, in that holy skillfulness which communion with God can alone impart.**

Though nature's eyes are dim, faith's vision is sharp. He is not to be deceived as to the relative positions assigned to Ephraim and Manasseh in the counsels of God. He has not, like his father Isaac, in Chapter 27, "tremble very exceedingly," in view of an almost fatal mistake. Quite the reverse. His intelligent reply to his less instructed son is, "I know it, my son, I know it," The power of sense has not, as in Isaac's case, dimmed his spiritual vision. He has been taught in the school of experience the importance of keeping close to the divine purpose, and nature's influence cannot move him from thence.

In Chapter 48:1, we have a very beautiful example of the mode in which our God ever rises above all our thoughts, and proves himself better than all our fears. "And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." To nature's view, Joseph was dead; whereas in God's view he was alive, and seated in the highest place of authority, next the throne. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9). Would that our souls could rise higher in their apprehension of God and his ways.

It is interesting to notice the way in which the titles "Jacob" and "Israel" are introduced in the close of the Book of Genesis; as, for example, "One told Jacob, and said, Behold thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." Then, it is immediately added, "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz." Now, we know, there is nothing in Scripture without its specific meaning, and hence this interchange of names contains some instruction. In general, it may be remarked, that "Jacob" sets forth the depth to which God had descended; "Israel," the height to which Jacob was raised.

Jacob's groundless fears dissipated by the sight of his son alive, and exalted,- the peculiar grace of God seen in its overruling power, yet evidently mingled with judgment, inasmuch as Jacob's sons have to go down into the very place whither they had sent their brother. Again, Joseph's remarkable grace throughout: though exalted by Pharaoh, he hides himself, as it were, and binds the people in abiding obligation to the king.

Pharaoh says, "**Go to Joseph,**" and Joseph, in effect, says, "all you have and all you are belong to Pharaoh."

This is sweetly interesting, and leads the soul on to that glorious time when the Son of man shall take the reins of government into his own hand, by divine appointment, and rule over the whole redeemed creation, his Church - the bride of the Lamb - occupying the nearest and most intimate place, according to the eternal counsels.

The house of Israel, fully restored, shall be nourished and sustained by his gracious hand; and all the earth shall know the deep blessedness of being under his sceptre.

Finally, having brought everything into subjection, he shall hand back the reins of government in to the hands of God, that "**he may be all in all.**"

From all this we may form some idea of the richness and copiousness of Joseph's history.

In short, it sets before us distinctly in type the mission of the Son to the house of Israel,- His humiliation and rejection, the deep exercises and final repentance and restoration of Israel,- the union of the church with Christ, - His exaltation and universal government, and, finally, it points us forward to the time when "**God shall be all in all.**"

It is quite needless to remark, that all these things are largely taught and fully established throughout the entire Canon of inspiration: we do not therefore build their truth upon Joseph's history; still it is edifying to find such early foreshadowings of these precious truths: it proves to us the divine unity which pervades Holy Scripture.

Whether we turn to Genesis or to Ephesians - to the prophets of the Old or those of the New Testament, - we learn the same truths.

"ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD."

C. H. M.

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