

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER TWO

THE closing lines of chapter 1 show us the people weeping before the Lord – **“And ye returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you. So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there.”**

There was no more reality in their tears than in their words, – their weeping was no more to be trusted than their confession.

It is possible for people to confess and shed tears without any true sense of sin in the presence of God. This is very solemn. It is really mocking God. We know, blessed forever be His name, that a truly contrite heart is His delight. He makes His abode with such.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

The tears that flow from a penitent heart are more precious, by far, to God than the cattle upon a thousand hills, because they prove that there is room in that heart for Him; and this is what He seeks, in His infinite grace. He wants to dwell in our hearts, and fill us with the deep, unspeakable joy of His own most blessed presence.

But Israel’s confession and tears at Kadesh were not real, and hence the Lord could not accept them.

The feeblest cry of a broken heart ascends directly to the throne of God, and is immediately answered by the soothing, healing balm of His pardoning love; but when tears and confession stand connected with self-will and rebellion, they are not only utterly worthless, but a positive insult to the divine Majesty.

Thus, then, the people had to turn back into the wilderness, and wander there for forty years. There was nothing else for it. They would not go up into the land, in simple faith, with God, and He would not go up with them in their self-will and self-confidence; they had, therefore, simply to accept the consequence of their disobedience. If they would not enter the land, they must fall in the wilderness.

How solemn is all this! and how solemn is the Spirit’s commentary upon it in the third chapter of Hebrews! and how pointed and forcible the application to us!

We must quote the passage for the benefit of the reader:

“Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, ‘To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in heart; and they have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest.’ Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today;’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; while it is said, ‘To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard; did provoke; howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was He grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard.’”

Here, as in every page of the inspired volume, we learn that unbelief is the thing that grieves the heart and dishonors the name of God; and not only so, but it robs us of the blessings, the dignities, and the privileges which infinite grace bestows.

We have very little idea of how much we lose, in every way, through the unbelief of our hearts.

Just as in Israel’s case the land was before them, in all its fruitfulness and beauty, and they were commanded to go and take possession, but **“they could not enter in because of unbelief;”** so with us – we fail to possess ourselves of the fullness of blessing which sovereign grace has put within our reach. The very treasury of Heaven is thrown open to us, but we fail to appropriate. We are poor, feeble, empty, and barren when we might be rich, vigorous, full, and fruitful. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, but how shallow is our apprehension! How feeble our grasp! How poor our thoughts!

Then, again, who can calculate how much we lose, through our unbelief, in the matter of the Lord’s work in our midst?

We read in the Gospel of a certain place in which our blessed Lord could not do many mighty works, because of their unbelief. Has this no voice for us? Do we too hinder Him by unbelief? We shall perhaps be told by some that the Lord will carry on His work irrespective of us or our faith; He will gather out His own and accomplish the number of His elect spite of our unbelief.

Not all the power of earth and hell – men and devils combined – can hinder the carrying out of His counsels and purposes; and as to His work, It is not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit.

Human efforts are in vain; and the Lord's cause can never be furthered by Nature's excitement.

Now, all this is perfectly true; but it leaves wholly untouched the inspired statement quoted above – **“He could there do not many mighty works, because of their unbelief.”**

Did not those people lose blessing through their unbelief? did they not hinder much good being done?

We must beware how we surrender our minds to the withering influence of a pernicious fatalism, which, with a certain semblance of truth, is utterly false, inasmuch as it denies all human responsibility and paralyzes all godly energy in the cause of Christ.

We have to bear in mind that the same One who, in His eternal counsels, has decreed the end, has also designed the means; and if we, in the sinful unbelief of our hearts and under the influence of one-sided truth, fold our arms and neglect the means, He will set us aside and carry on His work by other hands. He will work, blessed be His holy name, but we shall lose the dignity, the privilege, and the blessing of being His instruments.

Look at that striking scene in the second of Mark.

It most forcibly illustrates the great principle which we desire to press upon all who may read these lines. It proves the power of faith, in connection with the carrying on of the Lord's work. If the four men whose conduct is here set forth had suffered themselves to be influenced by a mischievous fatalism, they would have argued that it was no use doing anything – if the palsied man was to be cured he would be cured, without human effort.

Why should they busy themselves in climbing up on the house, uncovering the roof, and letting down the sick man into the midst before Jesus?

Ah, it was well for the palsied man and well for themselves that they did not act on such miserable reasoning as this. See how their lovely faith wrought.

- It refreshed the heart of the Lord Jesus;
- It brought the sick man into the place of healing, pardon, and blessing; and
- It gave occasion for the display of divine power, which arrested the attention of all present and gave testimony to the great truth that God was on earth, in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, healing diseases and forgiving sins.

Many other examples might be adduced, but there is no need.

All Scripture establishes the fact that unbelief hinders our blessing, hinders our usefulness, robs us of the rare privilege of being God's honored instruments in the carrying on of His glorious work, and of seeing the operations of His hand and His Spirit in our midst; and, on the other hand, that faith draws down power and blessing, not only for ourselves, but for others,- that it both glorifies and gratifies God, by clearing the platform of the creature and making room for the display of divine power.

In short, there is no limit to the blessing which we might enjoy at the hand of our God if our hearts were more governed by that simple faith which ever counts on Him, and which He ever delights to honor.

“According to your faith, be it unto you.”

Precious soul-stirring words! May they encourage us to draw more largely upon those exhaustless resources which we have in God. He delights to be used, blessed forever be His holy name. His word to us is, **“Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”** We can never expect too much from the God of all grace, who has given us His only begotten Son, and will with Him freely give us all things.

But Israel could not trust God to bring them into the land; they presumed to go in their own strength, and, as a consequence, were put to flight before their enemies. Thus it must ever be. Presumption and faith are two totally different things: the former can only issue in defeat and disaster; the latter, in sure and certain victory.

“Then we turned and took our journey into the wilderness, by the way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spake unto me; and we compassed Mount Seir many days.”

There is great moral beauty in the little word **“we.”**

Moses links himself thoroughly with the people.

He and Joshua and Caleb had all to turn back into the wilderness, in company with the unbelieving congregation. This might, in the judgment of nature, seem hard; but we may rest assured it was good and profitable. There is always deep blessing in bowing to the will of God, even though we may not always be able to see the why and the wherefore of things.

We do not read of a single murmuring word from these honored servants of God at having to turn back into the wilderness for forty years, although they were quite ready to go up into the land. No; they simply turned back. And well they might, when the Lord turned back also. How could they think of complaining, when they beheld the traveling-chariot of the God of Israel facing round to the wilderness? Surely the patient grace and long-suffering mercy of God might well teach them to accept, with a willing mind, a protracted sojourn in the wilderness, and to wait for the blessed moment of entrance upon the Promised Land.

It is a great thing always to submit ourselves meekly under the hand of God. We are sure to reap a rich harvest of blessing from the exercise. It is really taking the yoke of Christ upon us, which, as He Himself assures us, is the true secret of rest.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

What was this yoke? It was absolute and complete subjection to the Father's will.

This we see in perfection in our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He could say, "**Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.**"

Here was the point with Him – "**good in Thy sight.**" This settled everything. Was His testimony rejected? did He seem to labor in vain, and spend His strength for naught and in vain? What then? "**I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth.**" It was all right. Whatever pleased the Father, pleased Him. He never had a thought or wish that was not in perfect consonance with the will of God. Hence He, as a man, ever enjoyed perfect rest. He rested in the divine counsels and purposes. The current of His peace was unruffled, from first to last.

This was the yoke of Christ; and this is what He, in His infinite grace, invites us to take upon us, in order that we too may find rest unto our souls.

Let us mark and seek to understand the words, "**ye shall find rest.**"

We must not confound the "**rest**" which He gives with the "rest" which we find. When the weary, burdened, heavy-laden soul comes to Jesus in simple faith, He gives rest – settled rest – the rest which flows from the full assurance that all is done, sins forever put away; perfect righteousness accomplished, revealed, and possessed; every question divinely and eternally settled; God glorified; Satan silenced; conscience tranquilized.

Such is the rest which Jesus gives when we come to Him. But then we have to move through the scenes and circumstances of our daily life. There are trials, difficulties, exercises, buffetings, disappointments, and reverses of all sorts.

None of these can, in the smallest degree, touch the rest which Jesus gives; but they may very seriously interfere with the rest which we are to find. They do not trouble the conscience, but they may greatly trouble the heart; they may make us very restless, very fretful, very impatient.

For instance, I want to preach at Glasgow; I am announced to do so; but lo! I am shut up in a sick-room in London.

This does not trouble my conscience, but it may greatly trouble my heart; I may be in a perfect fever of restlessness, ready to exclaim, How tiresome! How terribly disappointing! Whatever am I to do? It is most untoward!

And how is this state of things to be met? How is the troubled heart to be tranquilized, and the restless mind to be calmed down? What do I want? I want to find rest; how am I to find it? By stooping down and taking Christ's precious yoke upon me – the very yoke which He Himself ever wore, in the days of His flesh – the yoke of complete subjection to the will of God.

I want to be able to say, without one atom of reserve – to say from the very depths of my heart, "**Thy will, O Lord, be done.**"

I want such a profound sense of His perfect love to me, and of His infinite wisdom in all His dealings with me, that I would not have it otherwise if I could – yea, that I would not move a finger to alter my position or circumstances, feeling assured that it is very much better for me to be suffering on a sick-bed in London than speaking on a platform in Glasgow.

Here lies the deep and precious secret of rest of heart, as opposed to restlessness.

It is the simple ability to thank God for everything, be it ever so contrary to our own will and utterly subversive of our own plans. It is not a mere assent to the truth that “**all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose;**” it is the positive sense – the actual realization of the divine fact that the thing which God appoints is the very best thing for us; it is perfect repose in the love, wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the One who has graciously undertaken for us in everything, and charged Himself with all that concerns us for time and eternity. We know that love will always do its very best for its object. What must it be to have God doing His very best for us? Where is the heart that would not be satisfied with God’s best if only it knows aught of Him?

But He must be known ere the heart can be satisfied with His will. Eve, in the Garden of Eden, beguiled by the serpent, became dissatisfied with the will of God. She wished for something which He had forbidden, and this something the devil undertook to supply. She thought the devil could do better for her than God. She thought to better her circumstances by taking herself out of the hands of God and placing herself in the hands of Satan. Hence it is that no unrenewed heart can ever, by any possibility, rest in the will of God.

If we search the human heart to the bottom, if we submit it to a faithful analysis, we shall not find so much as a single thought in unison with the will of God – no, not one.

And even in the case of the true Christian – the child of God, it is only as he is enabled, by the grace of God, to mortify his own will, to reckon himself dead, and to walk in the Spirit, that he can delight in the will of God, and give thanks in everything. It is one of the very finest evidences of the new birth to be able, without a single shade of reserve, to say, in respect to every dealing of the hand of God, “**Thy will be done.**” “**Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.**” When the heart is in this attitude, Satan can make nothing of it. It is a grand point to be able to tell the devil and to tell the world – tell them, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; not merely with the lips, but in the heart and the life – I am perfectly satisfied with the will of God.

This is the way to find rest. Let us see that we understand it. It is the divine remedy for that unrest, that spirit of discontent, that dissatisfaction with our appointed lot and sphere, so sadly prevalent on all hands. It is a perfect cure for that restless ambition so utterly opposed to the mind and spirit of Christ, but so entirely characteristic of the men of this world.

May we, beloved reader, cultivate, with holy diligence, that meek and lowly spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price, which bows to His blessed will in all things, and vindicates His dealings, come what may. Thus shall our peace flow as a river, and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be magnified in our course, character, and conduct.

Ere turning from the deeply interesting and practical subject which has been engaging our attention, we would observe that there are three distinct attitudes in which the soul may be found in reference to the dealings of God, namely, subjection, acquiescence, and rejoicing.

- when the will is broken, there is subjection;
- when the understanding is enlightened as to the divine object, there is acquiescence; and
- when the affections are engaged with God Himself, there is positive rejoicing.

Hence we read, in the tenth chapter of Luke, **“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, ‘I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.’ “**

That blessed One found His perfect delight in all the will of God. It was His meat and drink to carry out that will, at all cost. In service or in suffering, in life or in death, He never had any motive but the Father’s will. He could say, **“I do always the things that please Him.”** Eternal and universal homage to His peerless name!

We shall now proceed with our chapter.

“And the Lord spake unto me, saying, ‘Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward.’ “

The word of the Lord determined everything. It fixed how long the people were to remain in any given place, and it indicated with equal distinctness whither they were next to bend their steps. There was no need whatever for them to plan or arrange their movements: it was the province and prerogative of the Lord to settle all for them; it was theirs to obey. There is no mention here of the cloud and the trumpet; it is simply God’s word and Israel’s obedience.

Nothing can be more precious to a child of God, if only the heart be in a right condition, than to be guided, in all his movements, by the divine command.

It saves a world of anxiety and perplexity. In Israel’s case, called as they were to journey through a great and terrible wilderness, where there was no way, it was an unspeakable mercy to have their every movement, their every step, their every halting-place, ordered by an infallible Guide. There was no need whatever for them to trouble themselves about their movements, no need to inquire how long they were to stay in any given place, or where they were to go next; the Lord settled all for them. It was for them simply to wait on Him for guidance, and to do what they were told.

Yes, reader, here was the grand point – a waiting and an obedient spirit.

If this were lacking, they were liable to all sorts of questionings, reasonings, and rebellious activities.

When God said, “**Ye have compassed this mountain long enough,**” had Israel replied, No; we want to compass it a little longer: we are very comfortable here, and we do not wish to make any change; or, again, if when God said, “**Turn you northward**” they had replied, No; we vastly prefer going eastward; what would have been the result? Why, they would have forfeited the divine presence with them, and who could guide or help or feed them then? They could only count on the divine presence with them while they trod the path indicated by the divine command. If they chose to take their own way, there was nothing for them but famine, desolation, and darkness. The stream from the smitten rock, and the heavenly manna, were only to be found in the path of obedience.

Now, we Christians have to learn our lesson in all this – a wholesome, needed, valuable lesson.

It is our sweet privilege to have our path marked out for us, day by day, by divine authority. Of this we are to be most deeply and thoroughly persuaded. We are not to allow ourselves to be robbed of this rich blessing by the plausible reasonings of unbelief. God has promised to guide us, and His promise is yea and Amen. It is for us to make our own the promise, in the artless simplicity of faith. It is as solid and as real and as true as God can make it.

We cannot admit for a moment that Israel in the desert were better off in the matter of guidance than God’s heavenly people in their passage through this world. How did Israel know the length of the haltings or the line of their march? By the Word of God. Are we worse off? Far be the thought. Yea, we are better off by far than they. We have the Word and Spirit of God to guide us. To us pertains the high and holy privilege of walking in the footsteps of the Son of God.

Is not this perfect guidance? Yes, thank God, it is. Hear what our adorable Lord Jesus Christ saith to us, - “**I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.**”

Let us mark these words, “**he that followeth Me.**”

He has left us “**an example, that we should follow His steps.**” This is living guidance.

How did Jesus walk? Always and only by the commandment of His Father. By that He acted; by that He moved; without it He never acted, moved, or spoke.

Now, we are called to follow Him; and in so doing, we have the assurance of His own word that we shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Precious words! – “**the light of life.**”

Who can sound their living depths? who can duly estimate their worth?

“**The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth,**” and it is for us to walk in the full blaze of the light that shines along the pathway of the Son of God. Is there any uncertainty, any perplexity, any ground for hesitation here? Clearly not. How could there be if we are following Him? It is utterly impossible to combine the two ideas.

And be it remarked here that it is not by any means a question of having a literal text of Scripture for every movement or every act. For example, I cannot expect to get a text of Scripture, or a voice from Heaven, to tell me to go to London or to Edinburgh; or how long I am to stay when I go. How, then, it may be asked, am I to know where I ought to go, or how long I am to stay? The answer is, Wait on God, in singleness of eye and sincerity of heart, and He will make your path as plain as a sunbeam. This was what Jesus did; and if we follow Him, we shall not walk in darkness.

“I will guide thee with Mine eye” is a most precious promise; but in order to profit by it, we must be near enough to Him to catch the movement of His eye, and intimate enough with Him to understand its meaning.

Thus it is, in all the details of our daily life.

It would answer a thousand questions, and solve a thousand difficulties, if we did but wait for divine guidance, and never attempt to move without it. If I have not gotten light to move, it is my plain duty to be still. We should never move in uncertainty. It often happens that we harass ourselves about moving or acting, when God would have us to be still and do nothing. We go and ask God about it, but get no answer; we betake ourselves to friends for advice and counsel, but they cannot help us, for it is entirely a question between our own souls and the Lord. Thus we are plunged in doubt and anxiety. And why? Simply because the eye is not single; we are not following Jesus, **“the light of the world.”**

We may set it down as a fixed principle, a precious axiom in the divine life, that if we are following Jesus, we shall have the light of life. He has said it, and that is enough for faith.

Hence, then, we deem ourselves perfectly warranted in concluding that the One who guided His earthly people in all their desert wanderings, can and will guide His heavenly people now in all their movements and in all their ways. But, on the other hand, let us see to it that we are not bent on doing our own will, having our own way, and carrying out our own plans.

“Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.”

Be it our one grand aim to walk in the footsteps of that blessed One who pleased not Himself, but ever moved in the current of the divine will, never acted without divine authority; who, though Himself God over all, blessed forever, yet, having taken His place as a man, on the earth, surrendered completely His own will, and found His meat and His drink in doing the will of His Father.

Thus shall our hearts and minds be kept in perfect peace; and we shall be enabled to move on, from day to day, with firm and decided step, along the path indicated for us by our divine and ever-present Guide, who not only knows, as God, every step of the way, but who, as man, has trodden it before us, and left us an example that we should follow His steps. May we follow Him more faithfully in all things, through the gracious ministry of the HOLY GHOST, who dwelleth in us.

We have now to invite the reader's attention to a subject of very deep interest, and one which occupies a large place in Old Testament scripture, and is forcibly illustrated in the chapter which lies open before us, namely,

God's government of the world, and His wonderful ordering of the nations of the earth.

It is a grand and all-important fact to keep ever before the mind that the One whom we know as **"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,"** and our God and Father, takes a real, lively, personal interest in the affairs of nations – that He takes cognizance of their movements and of their dealings one with another.

True, all this is in immediate connection with Israel and the land of Palestine, as we read in the thirty-second chapter of our book, and eighth verse – a passage of singular interest and of great suggestive power – **"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel."**

Israel was and shall yet be God's earthly center; and it is a fact of the deepest interest that, from the very outset, as we see in Genesis 10, the Creator and Governor of the world formed the nations and fixed their bounds according to His own sovereign will, and with direct reference to the seed of Abraham, and that narrow strip of land which they are to possess, in virtue of the everlasting covenant made with their fathers.

But in the second chapter of Deuteronomy, we find the Lord, in His faithfulness and righteousness, interfering to protect three distinct nations in the enjoyment of their national rights, and that, too, against the encroachments of His own chosen people.

He says to Moses,

"Command thou the people, saying, 'Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot-breadth, because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink.' "

Israel might imagine that they had nothing to do but seize upon the lands of the Edomite; but they had to learn something very different,- they had to be taught that the Most High is the Governor amongst the nations – that the whole earth belongs to Him, and He portions it out to one or another according to His good pleasure.

This is a very magnificent fact to keep before the mind. The great majority of men think but little of it. Emperors, kings, princes, governors, statesmen, take little account of it. They forget that God interests Himself in the affairs of nations – that He bestows kingdoms, provinces, and lands as He sees fit.

They act, at times, as if it were only a question of military conquest, and as if God had nothing to do with the question of national boundaries and territorial possessions. This is their great mistake. They do not understand the meaning and force of this simple sentence, **“I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.”**

God will never surrender His rights in this respect. He would not allow Israel to touch a single atom of Esau’s property. They were, to use a modern phrase, to pay ready cash for whatever they needed, and go quietly on their way. Indiscriminate slaughter and plunder were not to be thought of by the people of God.

And mark the lovely reason for all this.

“For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand; He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, thou hast lacked nothing.”

They could well afford, therefore, to let Esau alone, and leave his possessions untouched. They were the favored objects of the Lord’s tender care. He took knowledge of every step of their weary journey through the desert. He had, in His infinite goodness, charged Himself with all their necessities. He was going to give them the land of Canaan, according to His promise to Abraham; but the self-same hand which was giving them Canaan had given Mount Seir to Esau.

We see the same thing exactly in reference to Moab and Ammon – **“The Lord said unto me, ‘Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle; for I will not give thee of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.’** “ And again, **“And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them; for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession, because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession.”**

The possessions here alluded to had been, of old time, in the hands of giants; but it was God’s purpose to give up their territories to the children of Esau and Lot, and therefore He destroyed these giants; for who or what can stand in the way of the divine counsels? **“That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time; . . . a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; but the Lord destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead: as He did to the children of Esau which dwelt in Seir, when He destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day”** (Ver. 20-23).

Hence, then, Israel were not permitted to meddle with the possessions of any of these three nations – the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites; but in the very next sentence, we see another thing altogether in the case of the Amorites – **“Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle.”**

The great principle, in all these varied instructions to Israel,
is that God's word must settle everything for His people.

It was not for Israel to inquire why they were to leave the possessions of Esau and Lot untouched, and to seize upon those of Sihon. They were simply to do what they were told. God can do as He pleases. He has His eye upon the whole scene: He scans it all. Men may think He has forsaken the earth, but He has not, blessed be His name. He is, as the apostle tells us in his discourse at Athens, **“Lord of Heaven and earth;”** and **“He hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth; and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations.”** And, further, **“He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the [habitable earth] world [οικουμενην] in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance [given proof] unto all, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.”**

Here we have a most solemn and weighty truth, to which men of all ranks and conditions would do well to take heed.

God is the Sovereign Ruler of the world. He giveth no account of any of His matters. He puts down one and sets up another. Kingdoms, thrones, governments, are all at His disposal. He acts according to His own will in the ordering and arrangement of human affairs. But, at the same time, He holds men responsible for their actings in the various positions in which His providence has placed them. The ruler and the ruled, the king, the governor, the magistrate, the judge – all classes and grades of men will have, sooner or later, to give account to God.

Each one, as if he were the only one, will have to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and there review his whole course, from first to last. Every act, every word, every secret thought, will there come out with awful distinctness. There will be no escaping in a crowd.

The Word declares that they shall be judged **“every man according to his works.”**

It will be intensely individual, and unmistakably discriminating. In a word, it will be a divine judgment, and therefore absolutely perfect. Nothing will be passed over. **“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment.”**

Kings, governors, and magistrates will have to account for the way in which they have used the power with which they were entrusted, and the wealth which passed through their hands. The noble and the wealthy who have spent their fortune and their time in folly, vanity, luxury, and self-indulgence will have to answer for it all before the throne of the Son of Man, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, to read men through and through; and His feet as fine brass, to crush, in unsparing judgment, all that is contrary to God.

Infidelity may sneeringly inquire, How can these things be? How could the untold millions of the human race find room before the judgment-seat of Christ? and how could there be time to enter so minutely into the details of each personal history? Faith replies, God says it shall be so, and this is conclusive; and as to the “How?” the answer is, God! Infinity! Eternity! Bring God in, and all questions are hushed and all difficulties disposed of in a moment.

In fact, the one grand, triumphant answer to all the objections of the infidel, the skeptic, the rationalist, and the materialist, is just that one majestic word, “God!”

We press this upon the reader; not, indeed, to enable him to reply to infidels, but for the rest and comfort of his own heart.

As to infidels, we are increasingly persuaded that our highest wisdom is to act on our Lord’s words in Matthew 15 – **“Let them alone.”**

It is perfectly useless to argue with men who despise the Word of God, and have no other foundation to build upon than their own carnal reasonings. But, on the other hand, we deem it to be of the very last possible importance that the heart should ever repose, in all the artless simplicity of a child, in the truth of God’s Word. **“Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?”**

Here is the sweet and hallowed resting-place of faith, the calm haven where the soul can find refuge from all the conflicting currents of human thought and feeling.

“The Word of the Lord endureth forever; and this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.”

Nothing can touch the Word of our God. It is settled forever in Heaven; and all we want is to have it hidden in our hearts, as our own very possession – the treasure which we have received from God – the living fountain where we may ever drink for the refreshment and comfort of our souls. Then shall our peace flow as a river, and our path shall be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Thus may it be, O Lord, with all Thy beloved people, in these days of growing infidelity. May Thy Holy Word be increasingly precious to our hearts. May our consciences feel its power. May, its heavenly doctrines form our character and govern our conduct in all the relationships of life, that Thy name may be glorified in all things.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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