

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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Exodus 1

We now approach, by the mercy of God, the study of the Book of Exodus, of which the great prominent theme is *redemption*. The first five verses recall to the mind the closing scenes of the preceding book. The favoured objects of God's electing love are brought before us; and we find ourselves, very speedily, conducted, by the inspired penman, into the section of the book.

In our meditations on the Book of Genesis, we were led to see that the conduct of Joseph's brethren toward him was that which led to their being brought down into Egypt.

This fact is to be looked at in two ways.

- in the first place, we can read therein a deeply solemn lesson as taught in Israel's actings toward God; and,
- secondly, we have, therein unfolded, an encouraging lesson, as taught in God's actings toward Israel.

And, first, as to Israel's actings toward God, what can be more deeply solemn than to follow out the results of their treatment of him who stands before the spiritual mind as the marked type of the Lord Jesus Christ? They, utterly regardless of the anguish of his soul, consigned Joseph into the hands of the uncircumcised. And what was the issue, as regards them? They were carried down into Egypt, there to experience those deep and painful exercises of heart which are so graphically and touchingly presented in the closing chapters of Genesis. Nor was this all. A long and dreary season awaited their offspring in that very land in which Joseph had found a dungeon.

But then God was in all this, as well as man; and it is His prerogative to bring good out of evil. Joseph's brethren might sell him to the Ishmaelites, and the Ishmaelites might sell him to Potiphar, and Potiphar might cast him into prison; but the Lord was above all, and He was accomplishing His own mighty ends. "**The wrath of man shall praise him.**" The time had not arrived in which the heirs were ready for the inheritance, and the inheritance for the heirs. The brickkilns of Egypt were to furnish a rigid school for the seed of Abraham, while, as yet, "**the iniquity of the Amorites**" was rising to a head, amid the "**hills and valleys**" of the promised

land.

All this is deeply interesting and instructive. There are “**wheels within wheels**” in the government of God. He makes use of an endless variety of agencies, in the accomplishment of His unsearchable designs. Potiphar’s wife, Pharaoh’s butler, Pharaoh’s dreams, Pharaoh himself, the dungeon, the throne, the fetters, the royal signet, the famine - all are at His sovereign disposal, and all be made instrumental in the development of His stupendous counsels.

The spiritual mind delights to dwell upon this.

It delights to range through the wide domain of creation and providence, and to recognize, in all, the machinery which an All-wise and an Almighty God is using for the purpose of unfolding His counsels of redeeming love. True, we may see many traces of the serpent; many deep and well-defined footprints of the enemy of God and man; many things which we cannot explain nor even comprehend; suffering innocence and successful wickedness may furnish an apparent basis for the infidel-reasoning of the skeptic mind; but the true believer can piously repose in the assurance that “**the Judge of all the earth shall do right.**”

He knows right well that,

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His ways in vain;

God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.”

Blessed be God for the consolation and encouragement flowing out of such reflections as these. We need them, every hour, while passing through an evil world, in which the enemy has wrought such appalling mischief, in which the lusts and passions of men produce such bitter fruits, and in which the path of the true disciple presents roughnesses which mere nature could never endure. Faith knows, of a surety, that there is One behind the scenes whom the world sees not nor regards; and, in the consciousness of this, it can calmly say, “**it is well,**” and, “**it shall be well.**”

The above train of thought is distinctly suggested by the opening lines of our book. “God’s counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.”

The enemy may oppose; but God will ever prove Himself to be above him; and all we need is a spirit of simple, child-like confidence and repose in the divine purpose.

Unbelief will rather look at the enemy’s efforts to countervail, than at God’s power to accomplish.

It is on the latter that faith fixes its eye. Thus it obtains victory, and It has to do with God and His infallible faithfulness. It rests not upon the ever shifting sands of human affairs and earthly influences, but upon the immovable rock of God’s eternal Word. That is faith’s holy and solid resting-place. Come what may, it abides in that sanctuary of strength.

“Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.” What then? Could death affect the counsels of the living God? Surely not. He only waited for the appointed moment, the due time, and then the most hostile influences were made instrumental in the development of His purposes.

“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land” (vv. 8-10)

All this is the reasoning of a heart that had never learnt to take God into its calculations. The unrenewed heart never can do so; and hence, the moment you introduce God, all its reasonings fall to the ground. Apart from, or independent of Him, they may seem very wise; but only bring Him in, and they are proved to be perfect folly.

But why should we allow our minds to be, in any wise, influenced by reasonings and calculations which depend, for their apparent truth, upon the total exclusion of God? To do so is, in principle, and according to its measure, practical atheism. In Pharaoh’s case, we see that he could accurately recount the various contingencies of human affairs, the multiplying of the people, the falling out of war, their joining with the enemy, their escape out of the land. All these circumstances he could, with uncommon sagacity, put into the scale; but it never once occurred to him that God could have anything whatever to do in the matter. Had he only thought of this, it would have upset his entire reasoning, and have written folly upon all his schemes.

Now it is well to see that it is ever thus with the reasonings of man’s skeptic mind.

God is entirely shut out; yea, the truth and consistency thereof depend upon His being kept out. The death-blow to all skepticism and infidelity is the introduction of God into the scene. Till He is seen, they may strut up and down upon the stage, with an amazing show of wisdom and cleverness; but the moment the eye catches even the faintest glimpse of that Blessed One, they are stripped of their cloak, and disclosed in all their nakedness and deformity.

In reference to the king of Egypt, it may, assuredly, be said, he did **“greatly err,”** not knowing God, or His changeless counsels. He knew not that, hundreds of years back, before ever he had breathed the breath of mortal life, God’s word and oath - **“two immutable things”** - had infallibly secured the full and glorious deliverance of that very people whom he was going, in his wisdom, to crush. All this was unknown to him; and, therefore, all his thoughts and plans were founded upon ignorance of that grand foundation-truth of all truths, namely, that God IS.

He vainly imagined that he, by his management, could prevent the increase of those concerning whom God had said, **“they shall be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore.”** His wise dealing, therefore, was simply madness and folly.

The wildest mistake which a man can possibly fall into is to act without taking God into his

account. Sooner or later, the thought of God will force itself upon him, and then comes the awful crash of all his schemes and calculations. At best, everything that is undertaken, independently of God, can last but for the present time. It cannot, by any possibility, stretch itself into eternity. All that is merely human, however solid, however brilliant, or however attractive, must fall into the cold grasp of death, and moulder in the dark, silent tomb. The clod of the valley must cover man's highest excellencies and brightest glories; mortality is engraved upon his brow, and all his schemes are evanescent. On the contrary, that which is connected with, and based upon, God, shall endure for ever. **"His name shall endure for ever, and his memorial to all generations."**

What a sad mistake, therefore, for a feeble mortal to set himself up against the eternal God, to "rush upon the thick bosses of the shield of the Almighty!"

As well might the monarch of Egypt have sought to stem, with his puny hand, the ocean's tide, as to prevent the increase of those who were the subjects of the Lord's everlasting purpose. Hence, although **"they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens,"** yet, **"the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."** Thus it must ever be. **"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision"** (Psalm 2:4).

Eternal confusion shall be inscribed upon all the opposition of men and devils. This gives sweet rest to the heart, in the midst of a scene where all is, apparently, so contrary to God and so contrary to faith.

Were it not for the settled assurance that **"the wrath of man shall praise"** the Lord, the spirit would often be cast down, while contemplating the circumstances and influences which surround one in the world. Thank God, **"we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."** (II Corinthians 4:18)

In the power of this, we may well say, **"rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass"** (Psalm 37:7). How fully might the truth of this be seen in the case of both the oppressed and the oppressor, as set before us in our chapter!

Had Israel **"looked at the things that are seen,"** what were they?

- Pharaoh's wrath,
- stern taskmasters,
- afflictive burdens,
- rigorous service,
- hard bondage,
- mortar and brick.

But, then, **"the things which are not seen,"** what were they?

- God's eternal purpose,

- His unfailing promise,
- the approaching dawn of a day of salvation,
- the “**burning lamp**” of the Lord’s deliverance.

Wondrous contrast Faith alone could enter into it. Nought save that precious principle could enable any poor, oppressed Israelite to look from out the smoking furnace of Egypt, to the green fields and vine-clad mountains of the land of Canaan. Who could possibly recognize in those oppressed slaves, toiling in the brick-kilns of Egypt, the heirs of salvation, and the objects of Heaven’s peculiar interest and favour.

Thus it was then, and thus it is now. “**We walk by faith, not by sight**” (II Corinthians 5:7) “**It doth not yet appear what we shall be**” (I John 3:2) We are “here in the body pent,” “**absent from the Lord.**” As to fact, we are in Egypt, yet, in spirit, we are in the heavenly Canaan. Faith brings the heart into the power of divine and unseen things, and thus enables it to mount above everything down here, in this place where death and darkness reign. Oh! for that simple child-like faith that sits beside the pure and eternal fountain of truth, there to drink those deep and refreshing draughts, which lift up the fainting spirit, and impart energy to the new man, in its upward and onward course.

The closing verses of this section of our book present an edifying lesson in the conduct of those God-fearing women, Shiphrah and Puah. They would not carry out the king’s cruel scheme, but braved his wrath, and hence, God made them houses. “**Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.**” (I Samuel 2:30)

May we ever remember this, and act for God, under all circumstances!

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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